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BIOGRAPHY

LOCKHART'S LIFE OF BURNS

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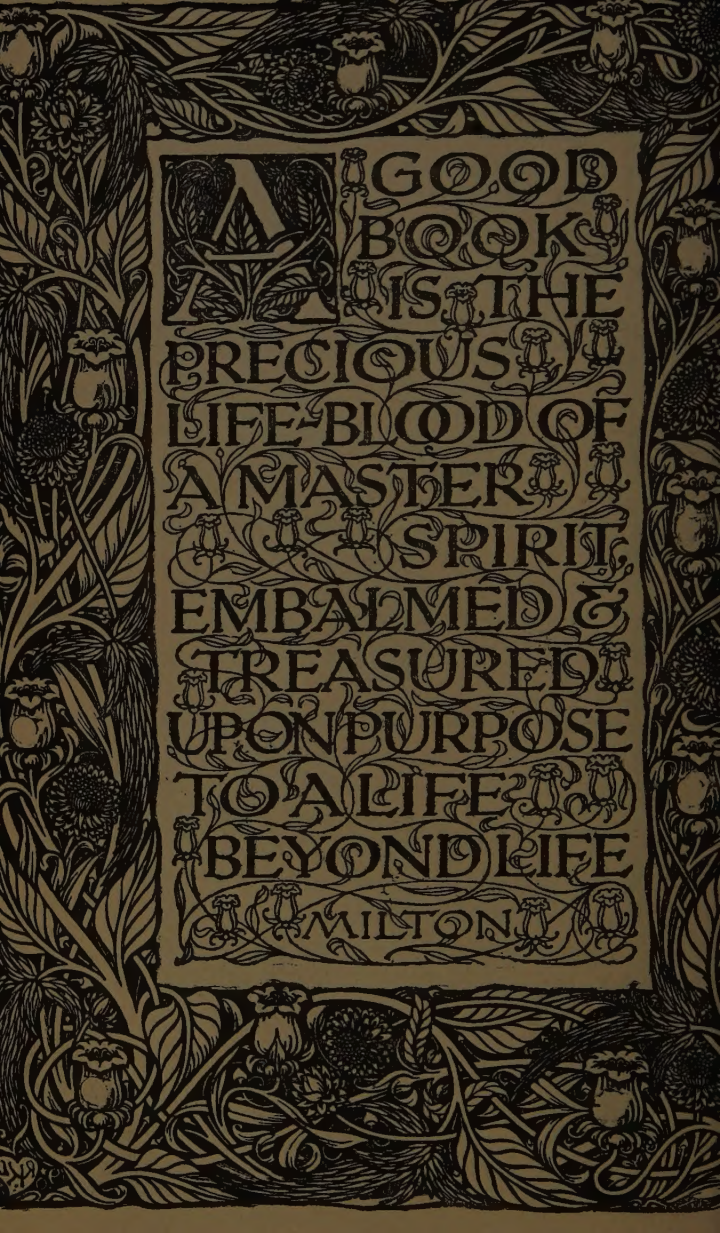
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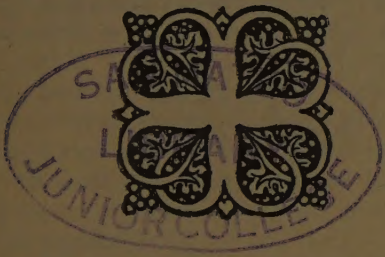
LIFE OF ROBERT BURNS BY J·G· LOCKHART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INTRODUCTION

THE *Life of Burns* was Lockhart's first serious essay in biography. He had been editor of the *Quarterly Review* for two years when he accepted the proposal that he should write it for *Constable's Miscellany*. It was partly written in London and Wimbledon, where Lockhart's household was established, partly at Portobello, where they spent the summer holidays of 1827. There Sir Walter Scott was a visitor every other day. On the 4th March 1828, Scott wrote to Lockhart in London, saying: "I saw some sheets of your *Burns*, which I have no doubt will supersede all former lives." Later in the same year, in December, when the book had appeared, Scott wrote again: "It has done you infinite credit. I would give you very good authority where you and I seem to differ, but you have chosen the wiser and better view, and Burns had a right to have his frailties spared, especially *post tantum temporis*. All people applaud it."

This "wiser and better view" leaves some of the high lights out of the picture. Lockhart, as Mr. Scott Douglas and other critics have pointed out, evaded the "Highland Mary" episode. He also cast a decent veil over the last years of all. But it must be remembered that Robert Burns's widow was still alive when he wrote, and that there were other contemporaries and connections of the poet to be considered.

Lockhart made some few errors in matters of fact. He says that the poet's father lived only six years at Mount Oliphant, whereas he renewed his six-year-lease for a second

term. He post-dates, too, the writing of *The Holy Fair*, which was composed some months before *The Ordination*, and some years before *The Kirk's Alarm*, with which he groups them in his third chapter; and he is out elsewhere in his chronology of the poems. But in essentials, his biography is sound and authentic, as we might expect of so rare a biographer.

We may repeat here what was said of him in the preamble to his *Life of Sir Walter Scott* in this series:

"Except perhaps for Mr Andrew Lang's *Life and Letters of Lockhart*, for some passages of Carlyle, and an essay or so of Mr Saintsbury's, the present generation would hardly realise how much of temperament, faculty and individuality there went to the making of Sir Walter Scott's biographer. We have to know his gift as a caricaturist, both with pen and pencil—to read some of his *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, which appeared (as the work of an imaginary Welsh author, Dr Morris) in 1819, and detach thence his veiled portrait of himself—and to con the sketches reproduced in Mr Lang's volumes in order to know the keenness of the eye and the nice cunning of the hand, whose practice in character-painting led up finally to his one great work."

Lockhart was born 14th July 1794, a son of the manse, at Cambusnethan, Lanark. He went to school in Glasgow, his father having received a charge there in 1796; and went on with a scholarship to Baliol College, Oxford, in his sixteenth year. He gained a first-class in classics, and took his B.C.L. in 1814 and his D.C.L. in 1834. He was called to the Scottish Bar, but with all his forcible intellectual qualities, Lockhart was not destined to succeed in that region. An early illness had left him slightly deaf; and this produced a shyness in mixed company,

and helped to cut him off from his friends when his fits of melancholy overtook him. We need hardly add that his wife was Sophia, Sir Walter Scott's eldest daughter, whom he married in 1820. He died 25th November 1854, at Abbotsford, in the very next chamber to that in which his great master had spent his last hours. He was buried in Dryburgh Abbey at Sir Walter Scott's feet.

The following is the table of his published books:

Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk, by Peter Morris the Odontist (pseud.), 1819; Valerius, a Roman Story, 1821; Some Passages in the Life of Mr Adam Blair, 1822; Reginald Dalton, a Story of English University Life, 1823; Ancient Spanish Ballads (trans.), 1823; Matthew Wald, a Novel, 1824; Life of Robert Burns, 1828; History of Napoleon Buonaparte, 1829; History of the late War, with Sketches of Nelson, Wellington and Napoleon, 1832; Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, 7 vols., 1836-8; Theodore Hook, a Sketch, 1852.

Lockhart was a contributor to *Blackwood*, and Editor of the *Quarterly Review*, from 1825 to 1853.

TO

JAMES HOGG, AND ALLAN CUNNINGHAM,

THIS VOLUME

IS

INSCRIBED,

IN TESTIMONY OF

ADMIRATION AND ESTEEM.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

SOME apology must be deemed necessary for any new attempt to write the *Life of Burns*. The present adventurer on that field has only this to offer—that Dr Currie's Memoir cannot be, with propriety, detached from the collection of the Poet's works, which it was expressly designed to accompany; and the regretted projector of *Constable's Miscellany* sought in vain for any other narrative sufficiently detailed to meet the purposes of his publication.

The last reprint of Dr Currie's Edition had the advantage of being superintended by Mr Gilbert Burns; and that excellent man, availing himself of the labours of Cromek, Walker, and Peterkin, and supplying many blanks from the stores of his own recollection, produced at last a book, in which almost everything that should be (and some things that never should have been) told, of his brother's history, may be found. There is, however, at least for indolent readers, no small inconvenience in the arrangement which Currie's Memoir, thus enlarged, presents. The frequent references to notes, appendices, and Letters not included in the same volume, are somewhat perplexing. And it may, moreover, be seriously questioned, whether Gilbert Burns's best method of answering many of his amiable author's unconscious misstatements and exaggerations, would not have been to expunge them altogether from a work with which posterity were to connect, in any shape or measure, the authority of his own name.

As to criticism on Burns's poetry, no one can suppose that anything of consequence remains to be added on a subject which has engaged successively the pens of Mackenzie, Heron, Currie, Scott, Jeffrey, Walker, Wordsworth, Campbell, and Wilson.

The humble purpose of the following Essay was, therefore, no more than to compress, within the limits of a single small volume, the substance of materials already open to all the world, and sufficient, in every point of view, for those who have leisure to collect, and candour to weigh them.

For any little touches of novelty that may be discovered in a Narrative, thus unambitiously undertaken, the writer is indebted to respectable authorities, which shall be cited as he proceeds. As to the earlier part of Burns's history, Currie and Walker appear to have left little unexplored; it is chiefly concerning the incidents of his closing years that their accounts have been supposed to admit of a supplement.

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Of him who walked in glory and in joy,
Behind his plough upon the mountain side.

WORDSWORTH.

LIFE OF ROBERT BURNS

CHAPTER I

"My father was a farmer upon the Carrick Border,
And soberly he brought me up in decency and order."

ROBERT BURNS was born on the 25th of January 1759, in a clay-built cottage, about two miles to the south of the town of Ayr, and in the immediate vicinity of the Kirk of Alloway, and the "Auld Brig o' Doon." About a week afterwards, part of the frail dwelling, which his father had constructed with his own hands, gave way at midnight; and the infant poet and his mother were carried through the storm, to the shelter of a neighbouring hovel.

The father, William *Burnes* or *Burness* (for so he spelt his name), was the son of a farmer in Kincardineshire, whence he removed at 19 years of age, in consequence of domestic embarrassments. The farm on which the family lived, formed part of the estate forfeited, in consequence of the Rebellion of 1715, by the noble house of Keith Marischall; and the poet took pleasure in saying, that his humble ancestors shared the principles and the fall of their chiefs. Indeed, after William Burnes settled in the west of Scotland, there prevailed a vague notion that he himself had *been out* in the insurrection of 1745-6; but though Robert would fain have interpreted his father's silence in favour of a tale which flattered his imagination, his brother Gilbert always treated it as a mere fiction, and such it was.[1] It is easy to suppose that when any obscure northern stranger fixed himself in those days in the Low

[1] Gilbert found among his father's papers a certificate of the minister of his native parish, testifying that "the bearer, William Burnes, had no hand in the late wicked rebellion."

Country, such rumours were likely enough to be circulated concerning him.

William Burnes laboured for some years in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh as a gardener, and then found his way into Ayrshire. At the time when Robert was born, he was gardener and overseer to a gentleman of small estate, Mr Ferguson of Doonholm; but resided on a few acres of land, which he had on lease from another proprietor, and where he had originally intended to establish himself as a nurseryman. He married Agnes Brown in December 1757, and the poet was their first-born.

William Burnes seems to have been, in his humble station, a man eminently entitled to respect. He had received the ordinary learning of a Scottish parish school, and profited largely both by that and by his own experience in the world. "I have met with few" (said the poet,[1] after he had himself seen a good deal of mankind) "who understood men, their manners, and their ways, equal to my father." He was a strictly religious man. There exists in his handwriting a little manual of theology, in the form of a dialogue, which he drew up for the use of his children, and from which it appears that he had adopted more of the Arminian than of the Calvinistic *doctrine;* a circumstance not to be wondered at, when we consider that he had been educated in a district which was never numbered among the strongholds of the Presbyterian church. The affectionate reverence with which his children ever regarded him, is attested by all who have described him as he appeared in his domestic circle; but there needs no evidence beside that of the poet himself, who has painted, in colours that will never fade, "the saint, the father, and the husband," of *The Cottar's Saturday Night.*

Agnes Brown, the wife of this good man, is described as "a very sagacious woman, without any appearance of forwardness, or awkwardness of manner;"[2] and it seems that, in features, and, as he grew up, in general address,

[1] Letter of Burns to Dr Moore, 22nd August 1787.

[2] Letter of Mr Mackenzie, surgeon at Irvine. Morrison, vol. ii. p. 261.

the poet resembled her more than his father.[1] She had an inexhaustible store of ballads and traditionary tales, and appears to have nourished his infant imagination by this means, while her husband paid more attention to "the weightier matters of the law."

These worthy people laboured hard for the support of an increasing family. William was occupied with Mr Ferguson's service, and Agnes,—like the wyfe of Auchtermuchtie, who ruled

> "Baith calvis and kye,
> And a' the house baith in and out,"—

contrived to manage a small dairy as well as her children. But though their honesty and diligence merited better things, their condition continued to be very uncomfortable; and our poet (in his letter to Dr Moore) accounts distinctly for his being born and bred "a very poor man's son," by the remark, that "stubborn ungainly integrity, and headlong ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances."

These defects of temper did not, however, obscure the sterling worth of William Burnes in the eyes of Mr Ferguson; who, when his gardener expressed a wish to try his fortune on a farm of his then vacant, and confessed at the same time his inability to meet the charges of stocking it, at once advanced £100 towards the removal of the difficulty. Burnes accordingly removed to this farm (that of Mount Oliphant, in the parish of Ayr) at Whitsuntide 1766, when his eldest son was between six and seven years of age. But the soil proved to be of the most ungrateful description; and Mr Ferguson dying, and his affairs falling into the hands of a harsh *factor* (who afterwards sat for his picture in the *Twa Dogs*), Burnes was glad to give up his bargain at the end of six years. He then removed about ten miles to a larger and better farm, that of Lochlea, in the parish of Tarbolton. But here, after a short interval of prosperity, some unfortunate misunderstanding took place as to the conditions of the lease; the dispute was referred to arbitration; and, after three years of suspense, the result involved Burnes in

[1] Letter of Mr Mackenzie, surgeon at Irvine. Morrison, vol ii. p. 261.

ruin. The worthy man lived to know of this decision; but death saved him from witnessing its necessary consequences. He died of consumption on the 13th February 1784. Severe labour, and hopes only renewed to be baffled, had at last exhausted a robust but irritable structure and temperament of body and of mind.

In the midst of the harassing struggles which found this termination, William Burnes appears to have used his utmost exertions for promoting the mental improvement of his children—a duty rarely neglected by Scottish parents, however humble their station, and scanty their means may be. Robert was sent, in his sixth year, to a small school at Alloway Miln, about a mile from the house in which he was born; but Campbell, the teacher, being in the course of a few months removed to another situation, Burnes and four or five of his neighbours engaged Mr John Murdoch to supply his place, lodging him by turns in their own houses, and ensuring to him a small payment of money quarterly. Robert Burns, and Gilbert his next brother, were the aptest and the favourite pupils of this worthy man, who survived till very lately, and who has, in a letter published at length by Currie, detailed, with honest pride, the part which he had in the early education of our poet. He became the frequent inmate and confidential friend of the family, and speaks with enthusiasm of the virtues of William Burnes, and of the peaceful and happy life of his humble abode.

"He was (says Murdoch) a tender and affectionate father; he took pleasure in leading his children in the path of virtue; not in driving them, as some parents do, to the performance of duties to which they themselves are averse. He took care to find fault but very seldom; and therefore, when he did rebuke, he was listened to with a kind of reverential awe. A look of disapprobation was felt; a reproof was severely so: and a stripe with the *tawz*, even on the skirt of the coat, gave heart-felt pain, produced a loud lamentation, and brought forth a flood of tears.

"He had the art of gaining the esteem and good-will of those that were labourers under him. I think I never saw him angry but twice: the one time it was with the fore-

man of the band, for not reaping the field as he was desired; and the other time, it was with an old man, for using smutty innuendos and *double entendres*."——

"In this mean cottage, of which I myself was at times an inhabitant, I really believe there dwelt a larger portion of content than in any place in Europe. *The Cottar's Saturday Night* will give some idea of the temper and manners that prevailed there."

The boys, under the joint tuition of Murdoch and their father, made rapid progress in reading, spelling, and writing; they committed psalms and hymns to memory with extraordinary ease—the teacher taking care (as he tells us) that they should understand the exact meaning of each word in the sentence ere they tried to get it by heart. "As soon,"[1] says he, "as they were capable of it, I taught them to turn verse into its natural prose order; sometimes to substitute synonymous expressions for poetical words; and to supply all the ellipses. Robert and Gilbert were generally at the upper end of the class, even when ranged with boys by far their seniors. The books most commonly used in the school were the *Spelling Book*, the *New Testament*, the *Bible*, *Mason's Collection of Prose and Verse*, and *Fisher's English Grammar*."—"Gilbert always appeared to me to possess a more lively imagination, and to be more of the wit, than Robert. I attempted to teach them a little church-music. Here they were left far behind by all the rest of the school. Robert's ear, in particular, was remarkably dull, and his voice untunable. It was long before I could get them to distinguish one tune from another. Robert's countenance was generally grave and expressive of a serious, contemplative, and thoughtful mind. Gilbert's face said, *Mirth, with thee I mean to live;* and certainly, if any person who knew the two boys, had been asked which of them was the most likely to court the Muses, he would never have guessed that *Robert* had a propensity of that kind."

"At those years," says the poet himself, in 1787, "I was by no means a favourite with anybody. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn

[1] Currie's *Life*, p. 88.

sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot piety. I say *idiot* piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar; and by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my infant and boyish days, too, I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery.[1] This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry; but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was *The Vision of Mirza*, and a hymn of Addison's, beginning, *How are thy servants blest, O Lord!* I particularly remember one half-stanza, which was music to my boyish ear—

> 'For though on dreadful whirls we hung
> High on the broken wave—'

I met with these pieces in *Mason's English Collection*, one of my school-books. The two first books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were, *The Life of Hannibal*, and *The History of Sir William Wallace*.[2] Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a tide of Scottish prejudice into

[1] Mr Robert Chambers tells me that this woman's name was Jenny Wilson, and that she outlived Burns, with whom she was a great favourite.

[2] The *Hannibal* was lent by Mr Murdoch; the *Wallace* by a neighbouring blacksmith.

my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest." [1]

And speaking of the same period and books to Mrs Dunlop, he says, "for several of my earlier years I had few other authors; and many a solitary hour have I stole out, after the laborious vocations of the day, to shed a tear over their glorious but unfortunate stories. In those boyish days I remember in particular being struck with that part of Wallace's story where these lines occur—

'Syne to the Leglen wood, when it was late,
To make a silent and a safe retreat.'

"I chose a fine summer day, the only day my line of life allowed, and walked half a dozen miles to pay my respects to the Leglen wood, with as much devout enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto; and explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countryman to have lodged."

Murdoch continued his instructions until the family had been about two years at Mount Oliphant—when he left for a time that part of the country. "There being no school near us," says Gilbert Burns, "and our little services being already useful on the farm, my father undertook to teach us arithmetic in the winter evenings by candle-light—and in this way my two elder sisters received all the education they ever received."

Gilbert tells an anecdote which must not be omitted here, since it furnishes an early instance of the liveliness of his brother's imagination. Murdoch, being on a visit to the family, read aloud one evening part of the tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*—the circle listened with the deepest interest until he came to Act 2, sc. 5, where Lavinia is introduced "with her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out." At this the children entreated, with one voice, in an agony of distress, that their friend would read no more. "If ye will not hear the play out," said William Burnes, "it need not be left with you."—"If it be left," cries Robert, "I will burn it." His father was about to chide him for this return to Murdoch's kindness—but the good young man interfered, saying he liked to see so much

[1] Letter to Dr Moore, 1787.

sensibility, and left *The School for Love* in place of his truculent tragedy. At this time Robert was nine years of age.

"Nothing," continues Gilbert Burns, "could be more retired than our general manner of living at Mount Oliphant; we rarely saw anybody but the members of our own family. There were no boys of our own age, or near it, in the neighbourhood. Indeed the greatest part of the land in the vicinity was at that time possessed by shopkeepers, and people of that stamp, who had retired from business, or who kept their farm in the country, at the same time that they followed business in town. My father was for some time almost the only companion we had. He conversed familiarly on all subjects with us, as if we had been men; and was at great pains, while we accompanied him in the labours of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge, or confirm us in virtuous habits. He borrowed *Salmon's Geographical Grammar* for us, and endeavoured to make us acquainted with the situation and history of the different countries in the world; while, from a book-society in Ayr, he procured for us the reading of *Derham's Physico* and *Astro-Theology*, and *Ray's Wisdom of God in the Creation*, to give us some idea of astronomy and natural history. Robert read all these books with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled. My father had been a subscriber to *Stackhouse's History of the Bible*. From this Robert collected a competent knowledge of ancient history; for *no book was so voluminous as to slacken his industry, or so antiquated as to damp his researches*." A collection of letters by eminent English authors, is mentioned as having fallen into Burns's hands much about the same time, and greatly delighted him.

When Burns was about thirteen or fourteen years old, his father sent him and Gilbert "week about, during a summer quarter," to the parish school of Dalrymple, two or three miles distant from Mount Oliphant, for the improvement of their penmanship. The good man could not pay two fees; or his two boys could not be spared at the same time from the labour of the farm!

"We lived very poorly," says the poet. "I was a dexterous ploughman for my age; and the next eldest to me was a brother (Gilbert), who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel writer might perhaps have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I. My indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent letters, which used to set us all in tears."

Gilbert Burns gives his brother's situation at this period in greater detail—"To the buffetings of misfortune," says he, "we could only oppose hard labour and the most rigid economy. We lived very sparingly. For several years butcher's meat was a stranger in the house, while all the members of the family exerted themselves to the utmost of their strength and rather beyond it, in the labours of the farm. My brother, at the age of thirteen, assisted in thrashing the crop of corn, and at fifteen was the principal labourer on the farm, for we had no hired servant, male or female. The anguish of mind we felt at our tender years, under these straits and difficulties, was very great. To think of our father growing old (for he was now above fifty), broken down with the long-continued fatigues of his life, with a wife and five other children, and in a declining state of circumstances, these reflections produced in my brother's mind and mine sensations of the deepest distress. I doubt not but the hard labour and sorrow of this period of his life, was in a great measure the cause of that depression of spirits with which Robert was so often afflicted through his whole life afterwards. At this time he was almost constantly afflicted in the evenings with a dull headache, which, at a future period of his life, was exchanged for a palpitation of the heart, and a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed, in the night-time."

The year after this, Burns was able to gain three weeks of respite, one before, and two after the harvest, from the labours which were thus straining his youthful strength. His tutor Murdoch was now established in the town of Ayr, and the boy spent one of these weeks in revising the English grammar with him; the other two were given to French. He laboured enthusiastically in the new pursuit,

and came home at the end of a fortnight with a dictionary and a *Telemaque*, of which he made such use at his leisure hours, by himself, that in a short time (if we may believe Gilbert) he was able to understand any ordinary book of French prose. His progress, whatever it really amounted to, was looked on as something of a prodigy; and a writing-master in Ayr, a friend of Murdoch, insisted that Robert Burns must next attempt *the rudiments of the Latin tongue*. He did so, but with little perseverance, we may be sure, since the results were of no sort of value. Burns's Latin consisted of a few scraps of hackneyed quotation, such as many that never looked into Ruddiman's *Rudiments* can apply, on occasion, quite as skilfully as he ever appears to have done. The matter is one of no importance; we might perhaps safely dismiss it with parodying what Ben Jonson said of Shakspeare; he had little French, and no Latin; and yet it is proper to mention, that he is found, years after he left Ayrshire, writing to Edinburgh in some anxiety about a copy of Moliere.

He had read, however, and read well, ere his sixteenth year elapsed, no contemptible amount of the literature of his own country. In addition to the books which have already been mentioned, he tells us that, ere the family quitted Mount Oliphant, he had read "the *Spectator*, some plays of Shakspeare, Pope (the *Homer* included), *Tull and Dickson on Agriculture*, *Locke on the Human Understanding*, Justice's *British Gardener's Directory*, Boyle's *Lectures*, Taylor's *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, Harvey's *Meditations*" (a book which has ever been very popular among the Scottish peasantry), "and the Works of Allan Ramsay;" and Gilbert adds to this list *Pamela* (the first novel either of the brothers read), two stray volumes of *Peregrine Pickle*, two of *Count Fathom*, and a single volume of "some English historian," containing the reigns of James I., and his son. "The *Collection of Songs*," says Burns,[1] "was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them, driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noticing the true, tender,

[1] Letter to Dr Moore, 1787.

or sublime, from affectation or fustian; and I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is."

He derived, during this period, considerable advantages from the vicinity of Mount Oliphant to the town of Ayr—a place then, and still, distinguished by the residence of many respectable gentlemen's families, and a consequent elegance of society and manners, not common in remote provincial situations. To his friend, Mr Murdoch, he no doubt owed, in the first instance, whatever attentions he received there from people older as well as higher than himself: some such persons appear to have taken a pleasure in lending him books, and surely no kindness could have been more useful to him than this. As for his coevals, he himself says, very justly, "It is not commonly at that green age that our young gentry have a just sense of the distance between them and their ragged playfellows. *My* young superiors," he proceeds, "never insulted the *clouterly* appearance of my plough-boy carcass, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books: among them, even then, I could pick up some observation; and one, whose heart I am sure not even the Munny [1] Begum scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these, my young friends and benefactors, as they occasionally went off for the East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction,—but I was soon called to more serious evils."—(Letter to Moore.) The condition of the family during the last two years of their residence at Mount Oliphant, when the struggle which ended in their removal was rapidly approaching its crisis, has been already described; nor need we dwell again on the untimely burden of sorrow, as well as toil, which fell to the share of the youthful poet, and which would have broken altogether any mind wherein feelings like his had existed, without strength like his to control them.

The removal of the family to Lochlea, in the parish of Tarbolton, took place when Burns was in his sixteenth

[1] The allusion here is to one of the sons of Dr John Malcolm, afterwards highly distinguished in the service of the East India Company.

year. He had some time before this made his first attempt in verse, and the occasion is thus described by himself in his letter to Moore.

"This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave, brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of Rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language; but you know the Scottish idiom —she was a *bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass.* In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion, I cannot tell: you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, etc.; but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed, I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan, when I looked and fingered over her little hand, to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly; and it was her favourite reel, to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song, which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself.

"Thus with me began love and poetry; which at times have been my only, and till within the last twelve months, have been my highest enjoyment."

The earliest of the poet's productions is the little ballad,

"O once I loved a bonnie lass,
Ay, and I love her still,
And whilst that honour warms my breast,
I'll love my handsome Nell," etc.

Burns himself characterises it as "a very puerile and silly performance;" yet it contains here and there lines of which he need hardly have been ashamed at any period of his life:—

"She dresses aye sae clean and neat,
Baith decent and genteel,
And then there's something in her gait
Gars ony dress look weel."

"Silly and puerile as it is," said the poet, long afterwards, "I am always pleased with this song, as it recalls to my mind those happy days when my heart was yet honest, and my tongue sincere. . . . I composed it in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it but my heart melts, my blood sallies, at the remembrance." (MS. Memorandum book, August 1783.)

In his first epistle to Lapraik (1785), he says:—

"Amaist as soon as I could spell,
I to the crambo-jingle fell,
Tho' rude and rough;
Yet crooning to a body's sell
Does weel eneugh."

And in some nobler verses, entitled *On my Early Days*, we have the following passage:—

"I mind it weel in early date,
When I was beardless, young and blate,
And first could thrash the barn,
Or haud a yokin' o' the pleugh,
An' tho' forfoughten sair eneugh,
Yet unco proud to learn—
When first amang the yellow corn
A man I reckoned was,
An' wi' the lave ilk merry morn
Could rank my rig and lass—
Still shearing and clearing
The tither stookit raw,
Wi' claivers and haivers
Wearing the day awa—

E'en then a wish, I mind its power,
A wish that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast:
That I for poor auld Scotland's sake,
Some useful plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang, at least:
The rough bur-thistle spreading wide
Amang the bearded bear,
I turn'd the weeder-clips aside,
And spared the symbol dear."

He is hardly to be envied who can contemplate without emotion, this exquisite picture of young nature and young genius. It was amidst such scenes that this extraordinary being felt those first indefinite stirrings of immortal ambition, which he has himself shadowed out under the magnificent image of "the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops, around the walls of his cave."[1]

[1] Letter to Dr Moore.

CHAPTER II

"O enviable early days,
When dancing thoughtless pleasure's maze,
To care and guilt unknown!
How ill exchanged for riper times,
To feel the follies or the crimes
Of others—or my own!"

As has been already mentioned, William Burnes now quitted Mount Oliphant for Lochlea, in the parish of Tarbolton, where, for some little space, fortune appeared to smile on his industry and frugality. Robert and Gilbert were employed by their father as regular labourers—he allowing them £7 of wages each *per annum;* from which sum, however, the value of any home-made clothes received by the youths was exactly deducted. Robert Burns's person, inured to daily toil, and continually exposed to every variety of weather, presented, before the usual time, every characteristic of robust and vigorous manhood. He says himself, that he never feared a competitor in any species of rural exertion; and Gilbert Burns, a man of uncommon bodily strength, adds, that neither he, nor any labourer he ever saw at work, was equal to the youthful poet, either in the corn-field, or the severer tasks of the thrashing-floor. Gilbert says, that Robert's literary zeal slackened considerably after their removal to Tarbolton. He was separated from his acquaintances of the town of Ayr, and probably missed not only the stimulus of their conversation, but the kindness that had furnished him with his supply, such as it was, of books. But the main source of his change of habits about this period was, it is confessed on all hands, the precocious fervour of one of his own turbulent passions.

"In my seventeenth year," says Burns, "to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school.—My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these

meetings; and my going was, what to this moment I repent, in opposition to his wishes. My father was subject to strong passions; from that instance of disobedience in me, he took a sort of dislike to me, which I believe was one cause of the dissipation which marked my succeeding years.[1] I say dissipation, comparatively with the strictness, and sobriety, and regularity of Presbyterian country life; for though the Will-o'-Wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path, yet early ingrained piety and virtue kept me for several years afterwards within the line of innocence. The great misfortune of my life was to want an aim. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labour. The only two openings by which I could enter the temple of Fortune, were the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture, I could never squeeze myself into it; —the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance! Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity, as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriacism that made me fly solitude; add to these incentives to social life, my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense; and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that, always where two or three met together,

[1] "I wonder," says Gilbert, "how Robert could attribute to our father that lasting resentment of his going to a dancing-school against his will, of which he was incapable. I believe the truth was, that about this time he began to see the dangerous impetuosity of my brother's passions, as well as his not being amenable to counsel, which often irritated my father, and which he would naturally think a dancing-school was not likely to correct. But he was proud of Robert's genius, which he bestowed more expense on cultivating than on the rest of the family—and he was equally delighted with his warmth of heart, and conversational powers. He had indeed that dislike of dancing-schools which Robert mentions; but so far overcame it during Robert's first month of attendance, that he permitted the rest of the family that were fit for it, to accompany him during the second month. Robert excelled in dancing, and was for some time distractedly fond of it."

there was I among them. But far beyond all other impulses of my heart, was *un penchant pour l'adorable moitié du genre humain.* My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and as in every other warfare in this world my fortune was various, sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared farther for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evenings in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on a love adventure without an assisting confident. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid dexterity, that recommended me as a proper second on these occasions, and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Tarbolton, as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe."

In regard to the same critical period of Burns's life, his excellent brother writes as follows:—"The seven years we lived in Tarbolton parish (extending from the seventeenth to the twenty-fourth of my brother's age) were not marked by much literary improvement; but, during this time, the foundation was laid of certain habits in my brother's character, which afterwards became but too prominent, and which malice and envy have taken delight to enlarge on. Though, when young, he was bashful and awkward in his intercourse with women, yet when he approached manhood, his attachment to their society became very strong, and he was constantly the victim of some fair enslaver. The symptoms of his passion were often such as nearly to equal those of the celebrated Sappho. I never indeed knew that he *fainted, sunk, and died away;* but the agitations of his mind and body exceeded anything of the kind I ever knew in real life. He had always a particular jealousy of people who were richer than himself, or who had more consequence in life. His love, therefore, rarely settled on persons of this description. When he selected any one out of the sovereignty of his good pleasure to whom he should pay his particular attention, she was instantly invested with a sufficient stock of charms, out of

the plentiful stores of his own imagination; and there was often a great dissimilitude between his fair captivator, as she appeared to others, and as she seemed when invested with the attributes he gave her. One generally reigned paramount in his affections; but as Yorick's affections flowed out toward Madame de L—— at the remise door, while the eternal vows of Eliza were upon him, so Robert was frequently encountering other attractions, which formed so many under-plots in the drama of his love."

Thus occupied with labour, love, and dancing, the youth "without an aim" found leisure occasionally to clothe the sufficiently various moods of his mind in rhymes. It was as early as seventeen (he tells us),[1] that he wrote some stanzas which begin beautifully:—

"I dream'd I lay where flowers were springing
Gaily in the sunny beam;
Listening to the wild birds singing,
By a falling crystal stream.
Straight the sky grew black and daring,
Thro' the woods the whirlwinds rave,
Trees with aged arms were warring,
O'er the swelling *drumlie* wave.
Such was life's deceitful morning," etc.

On comparing these verses with those on "Handsome Nell," the advance achieved by the young bard in the course of two short years, must be regarded with admiration; nor should a minor circumstance be entirely overlooked, that in the piece which we have just been quoting, there occurs but one Scotch word. It was about this time, also, that he wrote a ballad of much less ambitious vein, which, years after, he says, he used to con over with delight, because of the faithfulness with which it recalled to him the circumstances and feelings of his opening manhood.

—"My father was a farmer upon the Carrick border,
And carefully he bred me up in decency and order.
He bade me act a manly part, tho' I had ne'er a farthing;
For without an honest manly heart, no man was worth regarding.

[1] *Reliques*, p. 242.

Then out into the world my course I did determine;
Tho' to be rich was not my wish, yet to be great was charming;
My talents they were not the worst, nor yet my education;
Resolved was I at least to try to mend my situation.
. . . . . .
No help, nor hope, nor view had I, nor person to befriend me;
So I must toil, and sweat, and broil, and labour to sustain me.
To plough and sow, to reap and mow, my father bred me early;
For one, he said, to labour bred, was a match for fortune fairly.

Thus all obscure, unknown and poor, thro' life I'm doomed to wander;
Till down my weary bones I lay, in everlasting slumber.
No view, nor care, but shun whate'er might breed me pain or sorrow;
I live to-day, as well's I may, regardless of to-morrow," etc.

These are the only two of his very early productions in which we have nothing expressly about love. The rest were composed to celebrate the charms of those rural beauties who followed each other in the dominion of his fancy—or shared the capacious throne between them; and we may easily believe, that one who possessed, with his other qualifications, such powers of flattering, feared competitors as little in the diversions of his evenings as in the toils of his day.

The rural lover, in those districts, pursues his tender vocation in a style, the especial fascination of which town-bred swains may find it somewhat difficult to comprehend. After the labours of the day are over, nay, very often after he is supposed by the inmates of his own fireside to be in his bed, the happy youth thinks little of walking many long Scotch miles to the residence of his mistress, who, upon the signal of a tap at her window, comes forth to spend a soft hour or two beneath the harvest moon, or, if the weather be severe (a circumstance which never prevents the journey from being accomplished), amidst the sheaves of her father's barn. This "chappin' out," as they call it, is a custom of which parents commonly wink at, if they do not openly approve, the observance; and the consequences are far, very far, more frequently quite harmless, than persons not familiar with the peculiar manners and feelings of our peasantry may find it easy to believe. Excursions of this class form the theme of almost

all the songs which Burns is known to have produced about this period,—and such of these juvenile performances as have been preserved, are, without exception, beautiful. They show how powerfully his boyish fancy had been affected by the old rural minstrelsy of his own country, and how easily his native taste caught the secret of its charm. The truth and simplicity of nature breathe in every line—the images are always just, often originally happy—and the growing refinement of his ear and judgment, may be traced in the terser language and more mellow flow of each successive ballad.

The best of the songs written at this time is that beginning,—

"It was upon a Lammas night,
When corn rigs are bonnie,
Beneath the moon's unclouded light,
I held awa to Annie.
The time flew by wi' tentless heed,
Till, 'tween the late and early,
Wi' sma' persuasion she agreed
To see me thro' the barley," etc.

We may let the poet carry on his own story. "A circumstance," says he,[1] "which made some alteration on my mind and manners, was, that I spent my nineteenth summer on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home, at a noted school,[2] to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, etc., in which I made a good progress. But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were till this time new to me; but I was no enemy to social life. Here, though I learnt to fill my glass, and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a high hand with my geometry, till the sun entered Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my bosom, when a charming *filette*, who lived next door to the school, overset my trigonometry, and set me off at a tangent from the sphere of my

[1] Letter to Dr Moore.
[2] This was the school of Kirkoswald's.

studies. I, however, struggled on with my *sines* and *cosines* for a few days more; but stepping into the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, there I met my angel, like

'Proserpine, gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower.'——

"It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I staid, I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless.

"I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's Works; I had seen human nature in a new phasis; and I engaged several of my school-fellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly; I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me; and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far, that though I had not three-farthings worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of day-book and ledger.

"My life flowed on much in the same course till my twenty-third year. *Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle*, were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; Sterne and M'Kenzie—*Tristram Shandy* and *The Man of Feeling*—were my bosom favourites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind; but it was only indulged in according to the humour of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or other, as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed the work as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they found vent in rhyme; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet."

Of the rhymes of those days, few, when he wrote his letter to Moore, had appeared in print. *Winter, a dirge*, an admirably versified piece, is of their number; *the Death of Poor Mailie*, *Mailie's Elegy*, and *John Barleycorn;* and one charming song, inspired by the Nymph of Kirkoswald's, whose attractions put an end to his trigonometry.

"Now westlin winds, and slaughtering guns,
Bring Autumn's pleasant weather;
The moorcock springs, on whirring wings,
Amang the blooming heather. . . .
—Peggy dear, the evening's clear,
Thick flies the skimming swallow;
The sky is blue, the fields in view,
All fading green and yellow;
Come let us stray our gladsome way," etc.

John Barleycorn is a clever old ballad, very cleverly new-modelled and extended; but the *Death and Elegy of Poor Mailie* deserve more attention. The expiring animal's admonitions touching the education of the "poor toop lamb, her son and heir," and the "yowie, silly thing," her daughter, are from the same peculiar vein of sly homely wit, embedded upon fancy, which he afterwards dug with a bolder hand in the *Twa Dogs*, and perhaps to its utmost depth, in his *Death and Doctor Hornbook*. It need scarcely be added, that poor Mailie was a real personage, though she did not actually die until some time after her last words were written. She had been purchased by Burns in a frolic, and became exceedingly attached to his person.

"Thro' all the town she trotted by him;
A lang half-mile she could descry him;
Wi' kindly bleat, when she did spy him,
She ran wi' speed:
A friend mair faithfu' ne'er came nigh him,
Than Mailie dead."

These little pieces are in a much broader dialect than any of their predecessors. His merriment and satire were, from the beginning, Scotch.

Notwithstanding the luxurious tone of some of Burns's pieces produced in those times, we are assured by himself (and his brother unhesitatingly confirms the statement) that

no positive vice mingled in any of his loves, until after he had reached his twenty-third year. He has already told us, that his short residence "away from home" at Kirkoswald's, where he mixed in the society of sea-faring men and smugglers, produced an unfavourable alteration on some of his habits; but in 1781-2 he spent six months at Irvine; and it is from this period that his brother dates a serious change.

"As his numerous connexions," says Gilbert, "were governed by the strictest rules of virtue and modesty (from which he never deviated till his twenty-third year), he became anxious to be in a situation to marry. This was not likely to be the case while he remained a farmer, as the stocking of a farm required a sum of money he saw no probability of being master of for a great while. He and I had for several years taken land of our father, for the purpose of raising flax on our own account; and in the course of selling it, Robert began to think of turning flax-dresser, both as being suitable to his grand view of settling in life, and as subservient to the flax-raising."[1] Burns, accordingly, went to a half-brother of his mother's, by name Peacock, a flax-dresser in Irvine, with the view of learning this new trade, and for some time he applied himself diligently; but misfortune after misfortune attended him. The shop accidentally caught fire during the carousal of a New-year's-day's morning, and Robert "was left, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence." —"I was obliged," says he, "to give up this scheme; the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round my father's head; and what was worst of all, he was visibly far gone in a consumption; and, to crown my distresses, a *belle fille* whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony, jilted me, with pecular circumstances of mortification.[2] The finishing evil that

[1] David Sillar assured Mr Robert Chambers that this notion originated with William Burnes, who thought of becoming entirely a lint-farmer; and, by way of keeping as much of the profits as he could within his family, of making his eldest son a flax-dresser.

[2] Some letters referring to this affair are omitted in the "General Correspondence" of Gilbert's edition; for what reason I know not. They are surely as well worth preserving as many in the Collection, particularly when their early date is considered. The first of them begins thus:—"I verily believe, my dear E., that the pure genuine

brought up the rear of this infernal file, was, my constitutional melancholy being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—*Depart from me, ye cursed.*" The following letter, addressed by Burns to his father, three days before the unfortunate fire took place, will show abundantly that the gloom of his spirits had little need of that aggravation. When we consider by whom, to whom, and under what circumstances, it was written, the letter is every way a remarkable one:—

feelings of love are as rare in the world as the pure genuine principles of virtue and piety. This, I hope, will account for the uncommon style of all my letters to you. By uncommon, I mean their being written in such a serious manner, which, to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister. I don't know how it is, my dear; for though, except your company, there is nothing on earth gives me so much pleasure as writing to you, yet it never gives me those giddy raptures so much talked of among lovers. I have often thought, that if a well-grounded affection be not really a part of virtue, 'tis something extremely akin to it. Whenever the thought of my E. warms my heart, every feeling of humanity, every principle of generosity, kindles in my breast. It extinguishes every dirty spark of malice and envy, which are but too apt to invest me. I grasp every creature in the arms of universal benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of the happy, and sympathise with the miseries of the unfortunate. I assure you, my dear, I often look up to the divine Disposer of Events, with an eye of gratitude for the blessing which I hope he intends to bestow on me, in bestowing you."

What follows is from Burns's Letter, in answer to that in which the young woman intimated her final rejection of his vows.—"I ought in good manners to have acknowledged the receipt of your letter before this time, but my heart was so shocked with the contents of it, that I can scarcely yet collect my thoughts so as to write to you on the subject. I will not attempt to describe what I felt on receiving your letter. I read it over and over, again and again; and though it was in the politest language of refusal, still it was peremptory; 'you were sorry you could not make me a return, but you wish me' what, without you, I never can obtain, 'you wish me all kind of happiness.' It would be weak and unmanly to say that without you I never can be happy; but sure I am, that sharing life with you, would have given it a relish, that, wanting you, I never can taste." In such excellent English did Burns woo his country maidens in at most his twentieth year.

"HONOURED SIR,

"I have purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New-year's-day; but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons, which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder; and, on the whole, I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind, that I dare neither review past wants, nor look forward into futurity; for the least anxiety or perturbation in my breast produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are alightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment, is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought, that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains and uneasiness, and disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it; and, if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

'The soul, uneasy, and confined at home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.'

"It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations, than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer.[1] As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter

[1] The verses of Scripture here alluded to, are as follows:—

"15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

"16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

"17. For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed, I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing, to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which I hope have been remembered ere it is yet too late. Present my dutiful respects to my mother, and my compliments to Mr and Mrs Muir; and, with wishing you a merry New-year's-day, I shall conclude.

"I am, honoured Sir, your dutiful son,

"ROBERT BURNS."

"*P.S.*—My meal is nearly out; but I am going to borrow, till I get more."

"This letter," says Dr Currie, "written several years before the publication of his Poems, when his name was as obscure as his condition was humble, displays the philosophic melancholy which so generally forms the poetical temperament, and that buoyant and ambitious spirit which indicates a mind conscious of its strength. At Irvine, Burns at this time possessed a single room for his lodgings, rented, perhaps, at the rate of a shilling a-week. He passed his days in constant labour as a flax-dresser, and his food consisted chiefly of oatmeal, sent to him from his father's family. The store of this humble, though wholesome nutriment, it appears, was nearly exhausted, and he was about to borrow till he should obtain a supply. Yet even in this situation, his active imagination had formed to itself pictures of eminence and distinction. His despair of making a figure in the world, shows how ardently he wished for honourable fame; and his contempt of life, founded on this despair, is the genuine expression of a youthful and generous mind. In such a state of reflection, and of suffering, the imagination of Burns naturally passed the dark boundaries of our earthly horizon, and rested on those beautiful representations of a better world, where there is neither thirst, nor hunger, nor

sorrow, and where happiness shall be in proportion to the capacity of happiness."—*Life*, p. 102.

Unhappily for himself and for the world, it was not always in the recollections of his virtuous home and the study of his Bible, that Burns sought for consolation amidst the heavy distresses which "his youth was heir to." Irvine is a small sea-port; and here, as at Kirkoswald's, the adventurous spirits of a smuggling coast, with all their jovial habits, were to be met with in abundance. "He contracted some acquaintance," says Gilbert, "of a freer manner of thinking and living than he had been used to, whose society prepared him for overleaping the bounds of rigid virtue, which had hitherto restrained him."

I owe to Mr Robert Chambers (author of *Traditions of Edinburgh*) the following note of a conversation which he had in June 1826, with a respectable old citizen of this town:—"Burns was, at the time of his residence among us, an older-looking man than might have been expected from his age—very darkly complexioned, with a strong dark eye—of a thoughtful appearance, amounting to what might be called a gloomy attentiveness; so much so, that when in company which did not call forth his brilliant powers of conversation, he might often be seen, for a considerable space together, leaning down on his palm, with his elbow resting on his knee. He was in common silent and reserved; but when he found a man to his mind, he constantly made a point of attaching himself to his company, and endeavouring to bring out his powers. It was among women alone that he uniformly exerted himself, and uniformly shone. People remarked even then, that when Robert Burns did speak, he always spoke to the point, and in general with a sententious brevity. His moody thoughtfulness, and laconic style of expression, were both inherited from his father, who, for his station in life, was a very singular person."

One of the most intimate companions of Burns, while he remained at Irvine, seems to have been that David Sillar, to whom the *Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet*, was subsequently addressed. Sillar was at this time a poor schoolmaster in Irvine, enjoying considerable reputation

as a writer of local verses: and, according to all accounts, extremely jovial in his life and conversation.[1]

Burns himself thus sums up the results of his residence at Irvine:—"From this adventure I learned something of a town life; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn, was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic; but a great man in the neighbourhood, taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the world, the poor fellow in despair went to sea; where, after a variety of good and ill fortune, a little before I was acquainted with him, he had been set ashore by an American privateer, on the wild coast of Connaught, stripped of everything. . . . . His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. In some measure I succeeded; I had pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine; and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself, where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor—which hitherto I had regarded with honour. *Here his friendship did me a mischief.*" Professor Walker, when preparing to write his Sketch of the Poet's life, was informed by an aged inhabitant of Irvine, that Burns's chief delight while there was in discussing religious topics, particularly in those circles which usually gather in a Scotch churchyard

[1] If this person had some share in leading Burns into convivial dissipations, it is proper to observe, that his own conduct in after life made abundant atonement for that, and all his other early irregularities. Mr Sillar became in the sequel much more remarkable for strict habits of abstemiousness, than his unfortunate friend ever in reality was for the reverse; and worldly prosperity having attended his industry in a very uncommon degree, he survived till lately (if he does not still survive) one of the most respectable, as well as wealthy, inhabitants of his native town. He published a volume of poems, in some of which considerable ingenuity is displayed; and often filled with much credit the situation of a borough magistrate.

after service. The senior added, that Burns commonly took the high Calvinistic side in such debates; and concluded with a boast, that "the lad" was indebted to himself in a great measure for the gradual adoption of "more liberal opinions." It was during the same period, that the poet was first initiated in the mysteries of freemasonry, "which was," says his brother, "his first introduction to the life of a boon companion." He was introduced to St Mary's Lodge of Tarbolton by John Ranken, a very dissipated man of considerable talents, to whom he afterwards indited a poetical epistle, which will be noticed in its place.

"Rhyme," Burns says, "I had given up" (on going to Irvine); "but meeting with Ferguson's *Scottish Poems*, I strung anew my wildly sounding lyre with emulating vigour." Neither flax-dressing nor the tavern could keep him long from his proper vocation. But it was probably this accidental meeting with Ferguson, that in a great measure finally determined the *Scottish* character of Burns's poetry; and indeed, but for the lasting sense of this obligation, and some natural sympathy with the personal misfortunes of Ferguson's life, it would be difficult to account for the very high terms in which Burns always mentions his productions.

Shortly before Burns went to Irvine, he, his brother Gilbert, and some seven or eight young men besides, all of the parish of Tarbolton, had formed themselves into a society, which they called the Bachelors' Club; and which met one evening in every month for the purposes of mutual entertainment and improvement. That their cups were but modestly filled is evident; for the rules of the club did not permit any member to spend more than threepence at a sitting. A question was announced for discussion at the close of each meeting; and at the next they came prepared to deliver their sentiments upon the subject-matter thus proposed. Burns drew up the regulations, and evidently was the principal person. He introduced his friend Sillar during his stay at Irvine, and the meetings appear to have continued as long as the family remained in Tarbolton. Of the sort of questions discussed, we may form some notion from the minute of

one evening, still extant in Burns's hand-writing.—QUESTION FOR HALLOWE'EN (Nov. 11), 1780.—"*Suppose a young man, bred a farmer, but without any fortune, has it in his power to marry either of two women, the one a girl of large fortune, but neither handsome in person, nor agreeable in conversation, but who can manage the household affairs of a farm well enough; the other of them a girl every way agreeable in person, conversation, and behaviour, but without any fortune: which of them shall he choose?*" Burns, as may be guessed, took the imprudent side in this discussion.

"On one solitary occasion," says he, "we resolved to meet at Tarbolton in July, on the race-night, and have a dance in honour of our society. Accordingly, we did meet, each one with a partner, and spent the evening in such innocence and merriment, such cheerfulness and good humour, that every brother will long remember it with delight." There can be no doubt that Burns would not have patronised this sober association so long, unless he had experienced at its assemblies the pleasure of a stimulated mind; and as little, that to the habit of arranging his thoughts, and expressing them in somewhat of a formal shape, thus early cultivated, we ought to attribute much of that conversational skill which, when he first mingled with the upper world, was generally considered as the most remarkable of all his personal accomplishments.—Burns's associates of the Bachelors' Club, must have been young men possessed of talents and acquirements, otherwise such minds as his and Gilbert's could not have persisted in measuring themselves against theirs; and we may believe that the periodical display of the poet's own vigour and resources, at these club-meetings, and (more frequently than his brother approved) at the Freemason Lodges of Irvine and Tarbolton, extended his rural reputation; and, by degrees, prepared persons not immediately included in his own circle, for the extraordinary impression which his poetical efforts were ere long to create all over "the Carrick border."

Mr David Sillar gives an account of the beginning of his own acquaintance with Burns, and introduction into this Bachelors' Club, which will always be read with much

interest.—"Mr Robert Burns was some time in the parish of Tarbolton prior to my acquaintance with him. His social disposition easily procured him acquaintance; but a certain satirical seasoning with which he and all poetical geniuses are in some degree influenced, while it set the rustic circle in a roar, was not unaccompanied with its kindred attendant, suspicious fear. I recollect hearing his neighbours observe, he had a great deal to say for himself, and that they suspected his principles. He wore the only tied hair in the parish: and in the church, his plaid, which was of a particular colour, I think fillemot, he wrapped in a particular manner round his shoulders. These surmises, and his exterior, had such a magnetical influence on my curiosity, as made me particularly solicitous of his acquaintance. Whether my acquaintance with Gilbert was casual or premeditated, I am not now certain. By him I was introduced, not only to his brother, but to the whole of that family, where, in a short time, I became a frequent, and I believe, not unwelcome visitant. After the commencement of my acquaintance with the bard, we frequently met upon Sundays at church, when, between sermons, instead of going with our friends or lasses to the inn, we often took a walk in the fields. In these walks, I have frequently been struck with his facility in addressing the fair sex; and many times, when I have been bashfully anxious how to express myself, he would have entered into conversation with them with the greatest ease and freedom; and it was generally a death-blow to our conversation, however agreeable, to meet a female acquaintance. Some of the few opportunities of a noontide walk that a country life allows her laborious sons, he spent on the banks of the river, or in the woods, in the neighbourhood of Stair, a situation peculiarly adapted to the genius of a rural bard. Some book (generally one of those mentioned in his letter to Mr Murdoch) he always carried and read, when not otherwise employed. It was likewise his custom to read at table. In one of my visits to Lochlea, in time of a sowen supper, he was so intent on reading, I think *Tristram Shandy*, that his spoon falling out of his hand, made him exclaim, in a tone scarcely imitable, 'Alas, poor Yorick!' Such

was Burns, and such were his associates, when, in May 1781, I was admitted a member of the Bachelors' Club." —*Letter to Mr Aiken of Ayr, in Morrison's Burns*, vol. ii. pp. 257-260.

The misfortunes of William Burnes thickened apace, as has already been seen, and were approaching their crisis at the time when Robert came home from his flax-dressing experiment at Irvine. The good old man died soon after; and among other evils which he thus escaped, was an affliction that would, in his eyes, have been severe. The poet had not, as he confesses, come unscathed out of the society of those persons of "liberal opinions" with whom he consorted in Irvine; and he expressly attributes to their lessons, the scrape into which he fell soon after "he put his hand to plough again." He was compelled, according to the then all but universal custom of rural parishes in Scotland, to do penance in church, before the congregation, in consequence of the birth of an illegitimate child; and whatever may be thought of the propriety of such exhibitions, there can be no difference of opinion as to the culpable levity with which he describes the nature of his offence, and the still more reprehensible bitterness with which, in his *Epistle to Ranken*,[1] he inveighs against the clergyman, who, in rebuking him, only performed what was then a regular part of the clerical duty, and a part of it that could never have been at all agreeable to the worthy man whom he satirises under the appellation of "Daddie Auld." *The Poet's Welcome to an Illegitimate Child* was composed on the same occasion—a piece in which some very manly feelings are expressed, along with others which it can give no one pleasure to contemplate. There is a song in honour of the same occasion, or a similar one about the same period, *The rantin' Dog the Daddie o't*,—which

[1] There is much humour in some of the verses; as,

"'Twas ae night lately, in my fun,
I gaed a roving wi' my gun,
An' brought a paitrick to the grun',
A bonnie hen,
And, as the twilight was begun,
Thought nane wad ken," etc.

exhibits the poet as glorying, and only glorying in his shame.

When I consider his tender affection for the surviving members of his own family, and the reverence with which he ever regarded the memory of the father whom he had so recently buried, I cannot believe that Burns has thought fit to record in verse all the feelings which this exposure excited in his bosom. "To wave (in his own language) the quantum of the sin," he who, two years afterwards, wrote *The Cottar's Saturday Night*, had not, we may be sure, hardened his heart to the thought of bringing additional sorrow and unexpected shame to the fireside of a widowed mother. But his false pride recoiled from letting his jovial associates guess how little he was able to drown the whispers *of the still small voice;* and the fermenting bitterness of a mind ill at ease within itself, escaped (as may be too often traced in the history of satirists) in the shape of angry sarcasms against others, who, whatever their private errors might be, had at least done him no wrong.

It is impossible not to smile at one item of consolation which Burns proposes to himself on this occasion :—

> "——The mair they talk, *I'm kend the better;*
> E'en let them clash!"

This is indeed a singular manifestation of "the last infirmity of noble minds."

CHAPTER III

"The star that rules my luckless lot
Has fated me the russet coat,
And damn'd my fortune to the groat;
But in requit,
Has bless'd me wi' a random shot
O' country wit."

THREE months before the death of William Burnes, Robert and Gilbert took the farm of Mossgiel,[1] in the neighbouring parish of Mauchline, with the view of providing a shelter for their parents in the storm, which they had seen gradually thickening, and knew must soon burst; and to this place the whole family removed on William's death. "It was stocked by the property and individual savings of the whole family (says Gilbert), and was a joint concern among us. Every member of the family was allowed ordinary wages for the labour he performed on the farm. My brother's allowance and mine was £7 per annum each. And during the whole time this family concern lasted, which was four years, as well as during the preceding period at Lochlea, Robert's expenses never, in any one year, exceeded his slender income."

"I entered on this farm," says the poet,[2] "with a full resolution, *come, go, I will be wise.* I read farming books, I calculated crops, I attended markets; and, in short, in spite of the *devil, and the world, and the flesh*, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second, from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned, *like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*"

"At the time that our poet took the resolution of becoming *wise*, he procured," says Gilbert, "a little book of

[1] The farm consisted of 119 acres, and the rent was £90.
[2] Letter to Dr Moore.

blank paper, with the purpose, expressed on the first page, of making farming memorandums. These *farming memorandums* are curious enough," Gilbert slyly adds, "and a specimen may gratify the reader."—Specimens accordingly he gives; as,

> "O why the deuce should I repine,
> And be an ill foreboder?
> I'm twenty-three, and five-foot nine,—
> I'll go and be a sodger," etc.

> "O leave novells, ye Mauchline belles,
> Ye're safer at your spinning wheel;
> Such witching books are baited hooks
> For rakish rooks—like Rob Mossgiel.
> Your fine Tom Jones and Grandisons,
> They make your youthful fancies reel,
> They heat your veins, and fire your brains,
> And then ye're prey for Rob Mossgiel," etc., etc.

The four years during which Burns resided on this cold and ungrateful farm of Mossgiel, were the most important of his life. It was then that his genius developed its highest energies; on the works produced in these years his fame was first established, and must ever continue mainly to rest: it was then also that his personal character came out in all its brightest lights, and in all but its darkest shadows; and indeed from the commencement of this period, the history of the man may be traced, step by step, in his own immortal writings.

Burns now began to know that nature had meant him for a poet; and diligently, though as yet in secret, he laboured in what he felt to be his destined vocation. Gilbert continued for some time to be his chief, often indeed his only confident; and anything more interesting and delightful than this excellent man's account of the manner in which the poems included in the first of his brother's publications were composed, is certainly not to be found in the annals of literary history.

The reader has already seen, that long before the earliest of them was known beyond the domestic circle, the strength of Burns's understanding, and the keenness of his wit, as displayed in his ordinary conversation, and more particularly at masonic meetings and debating clubs

(of which he formed one in Mauchline, on the Tarbolton model, immediately on his removal to Mossgiel), had made his name known to some considerable extent in the country about Tarbolton, Mauchline, and Irvine; and this prepared the way for his poetry. Professor Walker gives an anecdote on this head, which must not be omitted. Burns already numbered several clergymen among his acquaintances: indeed, we know from himself, that at this period he was not a little flattered, and justly so, no question, with being permitted to mingle occasionally in their society.[1] One of these gentlemen told the Professor, that after entering on the clerical profession, he had repeatedly met Burns in company, "where," said he, "the acuteness and originality displayed by him, the depth of his discernment, the force of his expressions, and the authoritative energy of his understanding, had created a sense of his power, of the extent of which I was unconscious, till it was revealed to me by accident. On the occasion of my second appearance in the pulpit, I came with an assured and tranquil mind, and though a few persons of education were present, advanced some lengths in the service with my confidence and self-possession unimpaired; but when I saw Burns, who was of a different parish, unexpectedly enter the church, I was affected with a tremor and embarrassment, which suddenly apprised me of the impression which my mind, unknown to itself, had previously received." The Professor adds, that the person who had thus unconsciously been measuring the stature of the intellectual giant, was not only a man of good talents and education, but "remarkable for a more than ordinary portion of constitutional firmness."[2]

Every Scotch peasant who makes any pretension to understanding, is a theological critic—at least such *was* the case—and Burns, no doubt, had long ere this time distinguished himself considerably among those hard-headed groups that may usually be seen gathered together in the church-yard after the sermon is over. It may be guessed that from the time of his residence at Irvine, his strictures were too often delivered in no

[1] Letter to Dr Moore, *sub initio*.
[2] Life prefixed to Morrison's *Burns*, p. 45.

reverend vein. "Polemical divinity," says he to Dr Moore, in 1787, "about this time, was putting the country half mad, and I, ambitious of shining in conversation-parties on Sundays at funerals, etc., used to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue-and-cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour." There are some plain allusions to this matter in Mr David Sillar's letter, already quoted, and a surviving friend told Allan Cunningham, the other day, "that he first saw Burns on the afternoon of the Monday of a Mauchline Sacrament, lounging on horseback at the door of a public house, holding forth on religious topics to a whole crowd of country people, who presently became so much shocked with his levities, that they fairly hissed him from the ground."

To understand Burns's situation at this time, at once patronised by a number of clergymen, and attended with "a hue-and-cry of heresy," we must remember his own words, "that polemical divinity was putting the country half mad." Of both the two parties which, ever since the revolution of 1688, have pretty equally divided the Church of Scotland, it so happened that some of the most zealous and conspicuous leaders and partisans were thus opposed to each other, in constant warfare, in this particular district; and their feuds being of course taken up among their congregations, and spleen and prejudice at work, even more furiously in the cottage than in *the manse*, he who, to the annoyance of the one set of belligerents, could talk like Burns, might count pretty surely, with whatever alloy his wit happened to be mingled, in whatever shape the precious "circulating medium" might be cast, on the applause and countenance of the enemy. And it is needless to add, they were the less scrupulous sect of the two that enjoyed the co-operation, such as it was then, and far more important, as in the sequel it came to be, of our poet.

William Burnes, as we have already seen, though a most exemplary and devout man, entertained opinions very different from those which commonly obtained among the rigid Calvinists of his district. The worthy and pious old man himself, therefore, had not improbably infused into his son's mind its first prejudice against these

persons; though, had he lived to witness the manner in which Robert assailed them, there can be no doubt his sorrow would have equalled their anger. The jovial spirits with whom Burns associated at Irvine, and afterwards, were of course habitual deriders of the manners, as well as the tenets of the

"Orthodox, orthodox, wha believe in John Knox."

We have already observed the effect of the young poet's own first collision with the ruling powers of presbyterian discipline; but it was in the very act of settling at Mossgiel that Burns formed the connexion, which, more than any circumstance besides, influenced him as to the matter now in question. The farm belonged to the estate of the Earl of Loudoun, but the brothers held it on a sub-lease from Mr Gavin Hamilton, writer (*i.e.* attorney) in Mauchline, a man, by every account, of engaging manners, open, kind, generous, and high-spirited, between whom and Robert Burns, in spite of considerable inequality of condition, a close and intimate friendship was ere long formed. Just about this time it happened that Hamilton was at open feud with Mr Auld, the minister of Mauchline (the same who had already *rebuked* the poet), and the ruling elders of the parish, in consequence of certain irregularities in his personal conduct and deportment, which, according to the usual strict notions of kirk discipline, were considered as fairly demanding the vigorous interference of these authorities. The notice of this person, his own landlord, and, as it would seem, one of the principal inhabitants of the village of Mauchline at the time, must, of course, have been very flattering to our polemical young farmer. He espoused Gavin Hamilton's quarrel warmly. Hamilton was naturally enough disposed to mix up his personal affair with the standing controversies whereon Auld was at variance with a large and powerful body of his brother clergymen; and by degrees Mr Hamilton's ardent *protegé* came to be as vehemently interested in the church politics of Ayrshire, as he could have been in politics of another order, had he happened to be a freeman of some open borough, and his patron a candidate for the honour of representing it in St Stephen's.

Mr Cromek has been severely criticised for some details of Mr Gavin Hamilton's dissensions with his parish minister;[1] but perhaps it might have been well to limit the censure to the tone and spirit of the narrative,[2] since there is no doubt that these petty squabbles had a large share in directing the early energies of Burns's poetical talents. Even in the west of Scotland, such matters would hardly excite much notice nowadays, but they were quite enough to produce a world of vexation and controversy forty years ago; and the English reader to whom all such details are denied, will certainly never be able to comprehend either the merits or the demerits of many of Burns's most remarkable productions. Since I have touched on this matter at all, I may as well add, that Hamilton's family, though professedly adhering (as, indeed, if they were to be Christians at all in that district, they must needs have done) to the Presbyterian Establishment, had always lain under a strong suspicion of Episcopalianism. Gavin's grandfather had been curate of Kirkoswald's in the troubled times that preceded the Revolution, and incurred great and lasting popular hatred, in consequence of being supposed to have had a principal hand in bringing a thousand of *the Highland host* into that region in 1677-8. The district was commonly said not to have entirely recovered the effects of that savage visitation in less than a hundred years; and the descendants and representatives of the Covenanters, whom the curate of Kirkoswald's had the reputation at least of persecuting, were commonly supposed to regard with anything rather than ready good-will, his grandson, the witty writer of Mauchline. A well-nursed prejudice of this kind was likely enough to be met by counter-spleen, and such seems to have been the truth of the case. The lapse of another generation has sufficed to wipe out every trace of feuds, that were still abundantly discernible, in the days when Ayrshire first began to ring with the equally zealous applause and vituperation of,—

"Poet Burns,
And his priest-skelping turns."

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, vol. xiii. p. 273.
[2] *Reliques*, p. 164, etc.

It is impossible to look back now to the civil war, which then raged among the churchmen of the west of Scotland, without confessing, that on either side there was much to regret, and not a little to blame. Proud and haughty spirits were unfortunately opposed to each other; and in the superabundant display of zeal as to doctrinal points, neither party seems to have mingled much of the charity of the Christian temper. The whole exhibition was most unlovely—the spectacle of such indecent violence among the leading Ecclesiastics of the district, acted most unfavourably on many men's minds—and no one can doubt, that in the at best unsettled state of Robert Burns's principles, the unhappy effect must have been powerful indeed as to him.

Macgill and Dalrymple, the two ministers of the town of Ayr, had long been suspected of entertaining heterodox opinions on several points, particularly the doctrine of original sin, and even of the Trinity; and the former at length published an Essay, which was considered as demanding the notice of the Church-courts. More than a year was spent in the discussions which arose out of this; and at last Dr Macgill was fain to acknowledge his errors, and promise that he would take an early opportunity of apologising for them to his own congregation from the pulpit—which promise, however, he never performed. The gentry of the country took, for the most part, the side of Macgill, who was a man of cold unpopular manners, but of unreproached moral character, and possessed of some accomplishments, though certainly not of distinguished talents. The bulk of the lower orders espoused, with far more fervid zeal, the cause of those who conducted the prosecution against this erring doctor. Gavin Hamilton, and all persons of his stamp, were of course on the side of Macgill—Auld, and the Mauchline elders, with his enemies. Mr Robert Aiken, a writer in Ayr, a man of remarkable talents, particularly in public speaking, had the principal management of Macgill's cause before the Presbytery, and, I believe, also before the Synod. He was an intimate friend of Hamilton, and through him had about this time formed an acquaintance, which soon ripened into a warm friendship, with Burns. Burns, therefore, was from the

beginning a zealous, as in the end he was perhaps the most effective partisan, of the side on which Aiken had staked so much of his reputation. Macgill, Dalrymple, and their brethren, suspected, with more or less justice, of leaning to heterodox opinions, are the *New Light* pastors of his earliest satires.

The prominent antagonists of these men, and chosen champions of the *Auld Light*, in Ayrshire, it must now be admitted on all hands, presented, in many particulars of personal conduct and demeanour, as broad a mark as ever tempted the shafts of a satirist. These men prided themselves on being the legitimate and undegenerate descendants and representatives of the haughty Puritans, who chiefly conducted the overthrow of Popery in Scotland, and who ruled for a time, and would fain have continued to rule, over both king and people, with a more tyrannical dominion than ever the Catholic priesthood itself had been able to exercise amidst that high-spirited nation. With the horrors of the Papal system for ever in their mouths, these men were in fact as bigoted monks, and almost as relentless inquisitors in their hearts, as ever wore cowl and cord —austere and ungracious of aspect, coarse and repulsive of address and manners—very Pharisees as to the lesser matters of the law, and many of them, to all outward appearance at least, overflowing with pharisaical self-conceit, as well as monastic bile. That admirable qualities lay concealed under this ungainly exterior, and mingled with and checked the worst of these gloomy passions, no candid man will permit himself to doubt or suspect for a moment; and that Burns has grossly overcharged his portraits of them, deepening shadows that were of themselves sufficiently dark, and excluding altogether those brighter, and perhaps softer, traits of character, which redeemed the originals within the sympathies of many of the worthiest and best of men, seems equally clear. Their bitterest enemies dared not at least to bring against them, even when the feud was at its height of fervour, charges of that heinous sort, which they fearlessly, and I fear justly, preferred against their antagonists. No one ever accused them of signing the Articles, administering the sacraments, and eating the bread of a Church, whose fundamental

doctrines they disbelieved, and, by insinuation at least, disavowed.

The law of Church-patronage was another subject on which controversy ran high and furious in the district at the same period; the actual condition of things on this head being upheld by all the men of the New Light, and condemned as equally at variance with the precepts of the gospel, and the rights of freemen, by not a few of the other party, and, in particular, by certain conspicuous zealots in the immediate neighbourhood of Burns. While this warfare raged, there broke out an intestine discord within the camp of the faction which he loved not. Two of the foremost leaders of the Auld Light party quarrelled about a question of parish-boundaries; the matter was taken up in the Presbytery of Kilmarnock, and there, in the open court, to which the announcement of the discussion had drawn a multitude of the country people, and Burns among the rest, the reverend divines, hitherto sworn friends and associates, lost all command of temper, and abused each other *coram populo*, with a fiery virulence of personal invective, such as has long been banished from all popular assemblies, wherein the laws of courtesy are enforced by those of a certain unwritten code.

"The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light," says Burns, "was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them *dramatis personæ* in my *Holy Fair*. I had a notion myself, that the piece had some merit; but to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with *a roar of applause*."

This was *The Holy Tuilzie*, or *Twa Herds*, a piece not given either by Currie or Gilbert Burns, though printed without scruple by the Rev. Hamilton Paul, and certainly omitted, for no very intelligible reason, in editions where *The Holy Fair*, *The Ordination*, etc., found admittance. The two *herds*, or pastors, were Mr Moodie, minister of Riccartoun, and that favourite victim of Burns's, John Russell, then minister at Kilmarnock, and afterwards of Stirling.

"From this time," Burns says, "I began to be known in the country as a maker of rhymes. . . . *Holy Willie's Prayer* next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, and see if any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers"——: and to a place among profane rhymers, the author of this terrible infliction had unquestionably established his right. Sir Walter Scott speaks of it as "a piece of satire more exquisitely severe than any which Burns ever afterwards wrote—but unfortunately cast in a form too daringly profane to be received into Dr Currie's collection."[1] Burns's reverend editor, Mr Paul, nevertheless presents *Holy Willie's Prayer* at full length; and even calls on the friends of religion to bless the memory of the poet who took such a judicious method of "leading the liberal mind to a rational view of the nature of prayer."

"This," says that bold commentator, "was not only the prayer of Holy Willie, but it is merely the metrical version of every prayer that is offered up by those who call themselves the pure reformed church of Scotland. In the course of his reading and polemical warfare, Burns embraced and defended the opinions of Taylor of Norwich, Macgill, and that school of Divines. He could not reconcile his mind to that picture of the Being, whose very essence is love, which is drawn by the high Calvinists or the representatives of the Covenanters—namely, that he is disposed to grant salvation to none but a few of their sect; that the whole Pagan world, the disciples of Mahomet, the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, and even the Calvinists who differ from them in certain tenets, must, like Korah, Dathan and Abiram, descend to the pit of perdition, man, woman, and child, without the possibility of escape; but such are the identical doctrines of the Cameronians of the present day, and such was Holy Willie's style of prayer. The hypocrisy and dishonesty of the man, who was at the time a reputed Saint, were perceived by the discerning penetration of Burns, and *to expose them he considered his duty*. The terrible view of the Deity exhibited in that able production is precisely the same

[1] *Quarterly Review*, No I. p. 22.

view which is given of him, in different words, by many devout preachers at present. They inculcate, that the greatest sinner is the greatest favourite of heaven—that a reformed bawd is more acceptable to the Almighty than a pure virgin, who has hardly ever transgressed even in thought—that the lost sheep alone will be saved, and that the ninety-and-nine out of the hundred will be left in the wilderness, to perish without mercy—that the Saviour of the world loves the elect, not from any lovely qualities which they possess, for they are hateful in his sight, but 'he loves them because he loves them.' Such are the sentiments which are breathed by those who are denominated High Calvinists, and from which the soul of a poet who loves mankind, and who has not studied the system in all its bearings, recoils with horror. . . . The gloomy forbidding representation which they give of the Supreme Being, has a tendency to produce insanity, and lead to suicide."—*Life of Burns*, pp. 40-41.

The Reverend Hamilton Paul may be considered as expressing in the above, and in other passages of a similar tendency, the sentiments with which even the most audacious of Burns's anti-Calvinistic satires were received among the Ayrshire divines of the New Light; that performances so blasphemous should have been, not only pardoned, but applauded by ministers of religion, is a singular circumstance, which may go far to make the reader comprehend the exaggerated state of party feeling in Burns's native county, at the period when he first appealed to the public ear: nor is it fair to pronounce sentence upon the young and reckless satirist, without taking into consideration the undeniable fact—that in his worst offences of this kind, he was encouraged and abetted by those, who, to say nothing more about their professional character and authority, were almost the only persons of liberal education whose society he had any opportunity of approaching at the period in question. Had Burns received, at this time, from his clerical friends and patrons, such advice as was tendered, when rather too late, by a layman who was as far from bigotry on religious subjects as any man in the world, this great genius might have made his first approaches to the public notice in a very different character.

"Let your bright talents"—(thus wrote the excellent John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, in October 1787),—"Let those bright talents which the Almighty has bestowed on you, be henceforth employed to the noble purpose of supporting the cause of truth and virtue. An imagination so varied and forcible as yours, may do this in many different modes; nor is it necessary to be always serious, which you have been to good purpose; good morals may be recommended in a comedy, or even in a song. Great allowances are due to the heat and inexperience of youth;—and few poets can boast, like Thomson, of never having written a line, which, dying, they would wish to blot. In particular, I wish you to keep clear of the thorny walks of satire, which makes a man an hundred enemies for one friend, and is doubly dangerous when one is supposed to extend the slips and weaknesses of individuals to their sect or party. About modes of faith, serious and excellent men have always differed; and there are certain curious questions, which may afford scope to men of metaphysical heads, but seldom mend the heart or temper. Whilst these points are beyond human ken, it is sufficient that all our sects concur in their views of morals. You will forgive me for these hints."

Few such hints, it is likely, ever reached his ears in the days when they might have been most useful—days of which the principal honours and distinctions are thus alluded to by himself:—

> "I've been at drunken writers' feasts;
> Nay, been bitch-fou 'mang godly priests."

It is amusing to observe how soon even really bucolic bards learn the tricks of their trade: Burns knew already what lustre a compliment gains from being set in sarcasm, when he made Willie call for special notice to

> ——"Gaun Hamilton's deserts, ...
> He drinks, and swears, and plays at carts;
> Yet has sae mony takin' arts
> Wi' great and sma',
> Frae God's ain priests the people's hearts
> He steals awa," etc.

Nor is his other patron, Aiken, introduced with inferior

skill, as having merited Willie's most fervent execration by his "glib-tongued" defence of the heterodox doctor of Ayr:—

> "Lord! visit them wha did employ him,
> And for thy people's sake destroy 'em."

Burns owed a compliment to this gentleman's elocutionary talents. "I never knew there was any merit in my poems," said he, "until Mr Aiken *read them* into repute."

Encouraged by the "roar of applause" which greeted these pieces, thus orally promulgated and recommended, he produced in succession various satires wherein the same set of persons were lashed; as *The Ordination; The Kirk's Alarm*, etc., etc.; and last, and best undoubtedly, *The Holy Fair*, in which, unlike the others that have been mentioned, satire keeps its own place, and is subservient to the poetry of Burns. This was, indeed, an extraordinary performance; no partisan of any sect could whisper that malice had formed its principal inspiration, or that its chief attraction lay in the boldness with which individuals, entitled and accustomed to respect, were held up to ridicule: it was acknowledged amidst the sternest mutterings of wrath, that national manners were once more in the hands of a national poet; and hardly denied by those who shook their heads the most gravely over the indiscretions of particular passages, or even by those who justly regretted a too prevailing tone of levity in the treatment of a subject essentially solemn, that the Muse of Christ's Kirk on the Green had awakened, after the slumber of ages, with all the vigour of her regal youth about her, in "the auld clay biggin" of Mossgiel.

The Holy Fair, however, created admiration, not surprise, among the circle of domestic friends who had been admitted to watch the steps of his progress in an art of which, beyond that circle, little or nothing was heard until the youthful poet produced at length a satirical masterpiece. It is not possible to reconcile the statements of Gilbert and others, as to some of the minutiæ of the chronological history of Burns's previous performances; but there can be no doubt, that although from choice or

accident, his first provincial fame was that of a satirist, he had, some time before any of his philippics on the Auld Light divines made their appearance, exhibited to those who enjoyed his personal confidence, a range of imaginative power hardly inferior to what *The Holy Fair* itself displays; and, at least, such a rapidly improving skill in poetical language and versification, as must have prepared them for witnessing, without wonder, even the most perfect specimens of his art.

Gilbert says, that "among *the earliest* of his poems," was the *Epistle to Davie* (*i.e.* Mr David Sillar), and Mr Walker believes that this was written very soon after the death of William Burnes. This piece is in the very intricate and difficult measure of the Cherry and the Slae; and, on the whole, the poet moves with ease and grace in his very unnecessary trammels; but young poets are careless beforehand of difficulties which would startle the experienced; and great poets may overcome any difficulties if they once grapple with them; so that I should rather ground my distrust of Gilbert's statement, if it must be literally taken, on the celebration of *Jean*, with which the epistle terminates: and, after all, she is celebrated in the concluding stanzas, which may have been added some time after the first draught. The gloomy circumstances of the poet's personal condition, as described in this piece, were common, it cannot be doubted, to all the years of his youthful history; so that no particular date is to be founded upon these; and if this was the first, certainly it was not the last occasion, on which Burns exercised his fancy in the colouring of the very worst issue that could attend a life of unsuccessful toil. But Gilbert's recollections, however on trivial points inaccurate, will always be more interesting than anything that could be put in their place.

"Robert," says he, "often composed without any regular plan. When anything made a strong impression on his mind, so as to rouse it to a poetic exertion, he would give way to the impulse, and embody the thought in rhyme. If he hit on two or three stanzas to please him, he would then think of proper introductory, connecting, and concluding stanzas; hence the middle of a poem was

often first produced. It was, I think, in summer 1784, when in the interval of harder labour, he and I were weeding in the garden (kail-yard), that he repeated to me the principal part of this epistle (to Davie). I believe the first idea of Robert's becoming an author was started on this occasion. I was much pleased with the epistle, and said to him I was of opinion it would bear being printed, and that it would be well received by people of taste; that I thought it at least equal, if not superior, to many of Allan Ramsay's epistles, and that the merit of these, and much other Scotch poetry, seemed to consist principally in the knack of the expression—but here, there was a strain of interesting sentiment, and the Scotticism of the language scarcely seemed affected, but appeared to be the natural language of the poet; that, besides, there was certainly some novelty in a poet pointing out the consolations that were in store for him when he should go a-begging. Robert seemed very well pleased with my criticism, and we talked of sending it to some magazine; but as this plan afforded no opportunity of knowing how it would take, the idea was dropped.

"It was, I think, in the winter following, as we were going together with carts for coal to the family (and I could yet point out the particular spot), that the author first repeated to me the *Address to the Deil*. The curious idea of such an address was suggested to him, by running over in his mind the many ludicrous accounts and representations we have, from various quarters, of this august personage. *Death and Doctor Hornbook*, though not published in the Kilmarnock edition, was produced early in the year 1785. The schoolmaster of Tarbolton parish, to eke up the scanty subsistence allowed to that useful class of men, had set up a shop of grocery goods. Having accidentally fallen in with some medical books, and become most hobby-horsically attached to the study of medicine, he had added the sale of a few medicines to his little trade. He had got a shopbill printed, at the bottom of which, overlooking his own incapacity, he had advertised, that "Advice would be given in common disorders at the shop gratis." Robert was at a mason-meeting in Tarbolton, when the *Dominie* unfortunately made too ostentatious a

display of his medical skill. As he parted in the evening from this mixture of pedantry and physic, at the place where he describes his meeting with Death, one of those floating ideas of apparitions, he mentions in his letter to Dr Moore, crossed his mind; this set him to work for the rest of the way home. These circumstances he related when he repeated the verses to me next afternoon, as I was holding the plough, and he was letting the water off the field beside me. The *Epistle to John Lapraik* was produced exactly on the occasion described by the author. He says in that poem, *On Fasten-e'en we had a rockin'*. I believe he has omitted the word *rocking* in the glossary. It is a term derived from those primitive times, when the country-women employed their spare hours in spinning on the rock, or distaff. This simple implement is a very portable one, and well fitted to the social inclination of meeting in a neighbour's house; hence the phrase of *going a-rocking*, or *with the rock*. As the connexion the phrase had with the implement was forgotten when the rock gave place to the spinning-wheel, the phrase came to be used by both sexes on social occasions, and men talk of going with their rocks as well as women. It was at one of these *rockings* at our house, when we had twelve or fifteen young people with their *rocks*, that Lapraik's song, beginning—"When I upon thy bosom lean," [1] was sung, and we were informed who was the author. Upon this Robert wrote his first epistle to Lapraik; and his second in reply to his answer. The verses to the *Mouse* and *Mountain Daisy* were composed on the occasions mentioned, and while the author was holding the plough; I could point out the particular spot where each was composed. Holding the plough was a favourite situation with Robert for poetic compositions, and some of his best verses were produced while he was at that exercise. Several of the poems were produced for

[1] Burns was never a fastidious critic; but it is not very easy to understand his admiration of Lapraik's poetry. Emboldened by Burns's success, he, too, published: but the only one of his productions that is ever remembered now is this; and even this survives chiefly because Burns has praised it. The opening verse, however, is pretty. It may be seen at length in Allan Cunningham's *Scottish Songs*, vol. iii. p. 290.

the purpose of bringing forward some favourite sentiment of the author. He used to remark to me, that he could not well conceive a more mortifying picture of human life, than a man seeking work. In casting about in his mind how this sentiment might be brought forward, the elegy, *Man was made to Mourn*, was composed. Robert had frequently remarked to me, that he thought there was something peculiarly venerable in the phrase, "Let us worship God," used by a decent sober head of a family introducing family worship. To this sentiment of the author the world is indebted for *The Cottar's Saturday Night*. The hint of the plan, and title of the poem, were taken from Ferguson's *Farmer's Ingle*.

"When Robert had not some pleasure in view, in which I was not thought fit to participate, we used frequently to walk together, when the weather was favourable, on the Sunday afternoons (those precious breathing-times to the labouring part of the community), and enjoyed such Sundays as would make one regret to see their number abridged. It was in one of these walks that I first had the pleasure of hearing the author repeat *The Cottar's Saturday Night*. I do not recollect to have read or heard anything by which I was more highly *electrified*. The fifth and sixth stanzas, and the eighteenth, thrilled with peculiar ecstasy through my soul."

The poems mentioned by Gilbert Burns in the above extract, are among the most popular of his brother's performances; and there may be a time for recurring to some of their peculiar merits as works of art. It may be mentioned here, that John Wilson, *alias* Dr Hornbook, was not merely compelled to shut up shop as an apothecary, or druggist rather, by the satire which bears his name; but so irresistible was the tide of ridicule, that his pupils, one by one, deserted him, and he abandoned his school-craft also. Removing to Glasgow, and turning himself successfully to commercial pursuits, Dr Hornbook survived the local storm which he could not effectually withstand, and was often heard in his latter days, when waxing cheerful and communicative over a bowl of punch, "in the Saltmarket," to bless the lucky hour in which the dominie of Tarbolton provoked the castigation of Robert

Burns. In those days the Scotch universities did not turn out doctors of physic by the hundred, according to the modern fashion introduced by the necessities of the French revolutionary war; Mr Wilson's was probably the only medicine-chest from which salts and senna were distributed for the benefit of a considerable circuit of parishes; and his advice, to say the least of the matter, was perhaps as good as could be had, for love or money, among the wise women who were the only rivals of his practice. The poem which drove him from Ayrshire was not, we may believe, either expected or designed to produce any such serious effect. Poor Hornbook and the poet were old acquaintances, and in some sort rival wits at the time in the mason lodge.

In *Man was made to Mourn*, whatever might be the casual idea that set the poet to work, it is but too evident, that he wrote from the habitual feelings of his own bosom. The indignation with which he through life contemplated the inequality of human condition, and particularly,—and who shall say, with absolute injustice?—the contrast between his own worldly circumstances and intellectual rank, was never more bitterly, nor more loftily expressed, than in some of those stanzas.

"See yonder poor o'erlabour'd wight,
So abject, mean, and vile,
Who begs a brother of the earth
To give him leave to toil.
If I'm design'd yon lordling's slave—
By Nature's laws design'd—
Why was an independent wish
E'er planted in my mind?"

The same feeling strong, but triumphed over in the moment of inspiration, as it ought ever to have been in the plain exercise of such an understanding as his, may be read in every stanza of the *Epistle to Davie*.

"It's no in titles nor in rank,
It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,
To purchase peace and rest;
It's no in books, it's no in lear,
To mak us truly blest. . . . .
Think ye, that such as you and I,
Wha drudge and drive through wet and dry,
Wi' never-ceasing toil;

Think ye, are we less blest than they,
Wha scarcely tent us in their way,
As hardly worth their while?" . . . .

In *Man was made to Mourn*, Burns appears to have taken many hints from an ancient ballad, entitled *The Life and Age of Man*, which begins thus:—

"Upon the sixteen hunder year of God, and fifty-three,
Frae Christ was born, that bought us dear, as writings testifie;
On January, the sixteenth day, as I did lie alone,
With many a sigh and sob did say—Ah! man is made to moan!"

"I had an old grand-uncle," says the poet, in one of his letters to Mrs Dunlop, "with whom my mother lived in her girlish years; the good old man, for such he was, was blind long ere he died; during which time his highest enjoyment was to sit down and cry, while my mother would sing the simple old song of *The Life and Age of Man*."[1]

The Cottar's Saturday Night is, perhaps, of all Burns's pieces, the one whose exclusion from the collection, were such things possible nowadays, would be the most injurious, if not to the genius, at least to the character, of the man. In spite of many feeble lines, and some heavy stanzas, it appears to me, that even his genius would suffer more in estimation, by being contemplated in the absence of this poem, than of any other single performance he has left us. Loftier flights he certainly has made, but in these he remained but a short while on the wing, and effort is too often perceptible; here the motion is easy, gentle, placidly undulating. There is more of the conscious security of power, than in any other of his serious pieces of considerable length; the whole has the appearance of coming in a full stream from the fountain of the heart—a stream that soothes the ear, and has no glare on the surface.

It is delightful to turn from any of the pieces which present so great a genius as writhing under an inevitable burden, to this, where his buoyant energy seems not even to feel the pressure. The miseries of toil and penury, who shall affect to treat as unreal? Yet they shrunk to

[1] This ballad may be seen in Cromek's *Select Scottish Songs*.

small dimensions in the presence of a spirit thus exalted at once, and softened, by the pieties of virgin love, filial reverence, and domestic devotion.

That he who thus enthusiastically apprehended, and thus exquisitely painted, the artless beauty and solemnity of the feelings and thoughts that ennoble the life of the Scottish peasant, could witness observances in which the very highest of these redeeming influences are most powerfully and gracefully displayed, and yet describe them in a vein of unmixed merriment—that the same man should have produced *The Cottar's Saturday Night* and *The Holy Fair* about the same time—will ever continue to move wonder and regret.

"The annual celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the rural parishes of Scotland, has much in it," says the unfortunate Heron, "of those old popish festivals, in which superstition, traffic, and amusement, used to be strangely intermingled. Burns saw and seized in it one of the happiest of all subjects to afford scope for the display of that strong and piercing sagacity, by which he could almost intuitively distinguish the reasonable from the absurd, and the becoming from the ridiculous; of that picturesque power of fancy which enabled him to represent scenes, and persons, and groups, and looks, and attitudes, and gestures, in a manner almost as lively and impressive, even in words, as if all the artifices and energies of the pencil had been employed; of that knowledge which he had necessarily acquired of the manners, passions, and prejudices of the rustics around him—of whatever was ridiculous, no less than whatever was affectingly beautiful in rural life."[1] This is very good so far as it goes; but who ever disputed the exquisite graphic truth, so far as it goes, of the poem to which the critic refers? The question remains as it stood; is there then nothing besides a strange mixture of superstition, traffic, and amusement, in the scene which such an annual celebration in a rural parish of Scotland presents? Does nothing of what is "affectingly beautiful in rural life," make a part in the original which was before the poet's eyes? Were "Superstition," "Hypocrisy," and "Fun,"

[1] Heron's *Memoirs of Burns* (Edinburgh, 1797), p. 14.

the only influences which he might justly have impersonated? It would be hard, I think, to speak so even of the old Popish festivals to which Mr Heron alludes; it would be hard, surely, to say it of any festival in which, mingled as they may be with sanctimonious pretenders, and surrounded with giddy groups of onlookers, a mighty multitude of devout men are assembled for the worship of God, beneath the open heaven, and above the tombs of their fathers.

Let us beware, however, of pushing our censure of a young poet, mad with the inspiration of the moment, from whatever source derived, too far. It can hardly be doubted that the author of *The Cottar's Saturday Night* had felt, in his time, all that any man can feel in the contemplation of the most sublime of the religious observances of his country; and as little, that had he taken up the subject of this rural sacrament in a solemn mood, he might have produced a piece as gravely beautiful, as his *Holy Fair* is quaint, graphic, and picturesque. A scene of family worship, on the other hand, I can easily imagine to have come from his hand as pregnant with the ludicrous as that Holy Fair itself. The family prayers of the Saturday's night, and the rural celebration of the Eucharist, are parts of the same system—the system which has made the people of Scotland what they are—and what, it is to be hoped, they will continue to be. And when men ask of themselves what this great national poet really thought of a system in which minds immeasurably inferior to his can see so much to venerate, it is surely just that they should pay most attention to what he has delivered under the gravest sanction. In noble natures, we may be sure, the source of tears lies nearer the heart than that of smiles.

The Reverend Hamilton Paul does not desert his post on occasion of *The Holy Fair;* he defends that piece as manfully as *Holy Willie;* and, indeed, expressly applauds Burns for having endeavoured to explode "abuses discountenanced by the General Assembly." The General Assembly would no doubt say, both of the poet and the commentator, *non tali auxilio.*

Hallowe'en, a descriptive poem, perhaps even more ex-

quisitely wrought than *The Holy Fair*, and containing nothing that could offend the feelings of anybody, was produced about the same period. Burns's art had now reached its climax; but it is time that we should revert more particularly to the personal history of the poet.

He seems to have very soon perceived, that the farm of Mossgiel could at the best furnish no more than the bare means of existence to so large a family; and wearied with the "prospects drear," from which he only escaped in occasional intervals of social merriment, or when gay flashes of solitary fancy, for they were no more, threw sunshine on everything, he very naturally took up the notion of quitting Scotland for a time, and trying his fortune in the West Indies, where, as is well known, the managers of the plantations are, in the great majority of cases, Scotchmen of Burns's own rank and condition. His letters show, that on two or three different occasions, long before his poetry had excited any attention, he had applied for, and nearly obtained appointments of this sort, through the intervention of his acquaintances in the seaport of Irvine. Petty accidents, not worth describing, interfered to disappoint him from time to time; but at last a new burst of misfortune rendered him doubly anxious to escape from his native land; and but for an accident, which no one will call petty, his arrangements would certainly have been completed.

But we must not come quite so rapidly to the last of his Ayrshire love-stories.

How many lesser romances of this order were evolved and completed during his residence at Mossgiel, it is needless to inquire; that they were many, his songs prove, for in those days he wrote no love-songs on imaginary heroines.[1] *Mary Morison—Behind yon hills where Stinchar flows—On Cessnock bank there lives a lass*—belong to this period; and there are three or four inspired by Mary Campbell—the object of by far the deepest passion that ever Burns knew, and which he has accordingly immortalised in the noblest of his elegiacs.

In introducing to Mr Thomson's notice the song,—

[1] Letters to Mr Thomson, No. IV.

"Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary,
And leave auld Scotia's shore?—
Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary,
Across the Atlantic's roar?"

Burns says, "In my early years, when I was thinking of going to the West Indies, I took this farewell of a dear girl;" and, afterwards, in a note on—

"Ye banks, and braes, and streams around
The Castle o' Montgomerie;
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,
Your waters never drumlie;
There Summer first unfaulds her robes,
And there they langest tarry,
For there I took the last farewell
O' my sweet Highland Mary,"

he adds,—"After a pretty long trial of the most ardent reciprocal affection, we met by appointment on the second Sunday of May, in a sequestered spot by the banks of Ayr, where we spent a day in taking a farewell before she should embark for the West Highlands, to arrange matters among her friends for our projected change of life. At the close of the autumn following she crossed the sea to meet me at Greenock, where she had scarce landed when she was seized with a malignant fever, which hurried my dear girl to her grave in a few days, before I could even hear of her illness;" and Mr Cromek, speaking of the same "day of parting love," gives, though without mentioning his authority, some further particulars, which no one would willingly believe to be apocryphal. "This adieu," says that zealous inquirer into the details of Burns's story, "was performed with all those simple and striking ceremonials, which rustic sentiment has devised to prolong tender emotions, and to impose awe. The lovers stood on each side of a small purling brook—they laved their hands in the limpid stream—and, holding a Bible between them, pronounced their vows to be faithful to each other. They parted—never to meet again." It is proper to add, that Mr Cromek's story, which even Allan Cunningham was disposed to receive with suspicion, has recently been confirmed very strongly by the accidental discovery of a

Bible, presented by Burns to *Mary Campbell*, in the possession of her still surviving sister at Ardrossan. Upon the boards of the first volume is inscribed, in Burns's handwriting,—"And ye shall not swear by my name falsely—I am the Lord.—Levit. chap. xix. v. 12." On the second volume,—"Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oath.—St Matth. chap. v., v. 33." And, on a blank leaf of either,—"Robert Burns, Mossgiel."

How lasting was the poet's remembrance of this pure love, and its tragic termination, will be seen hereafter.[1]

Highland Mary, however, seems to have died ere her lover had made any of his more serious attempts in poetry. In the Epistle to Mr Sillar (as we have already hinted), the very earliest, according to Gilbert, of these attempts, the poet celebrates "his Davie and his Jean."

This was Jean Armour, a young woman, a step, if anything, above Burns's own rank in life,[2] the daughter of a respectable man, a master-mason, in the village of Mauchline, where she was at the time the reigning toast, and who still survives, as the respected widow of our poet. There are numberless allusions to her maiden charms in the best pieces which he produced at Mossgiel.

The time is not yet come, in which all the details of this story can be expected. Jean Armour found herself "as ladies wish to be that love their *lords*." And how slightly such a circumstance might affect the character and reputation of a young woman in her sphere of rural life at that period, every Scotsman will understand—to any but a Scotsman, it might, perhaps, be difficult to explain. The manly readiness with which the young rustics commonly come forward to avert by marriage the worst

[1] Cromek, p. 238.

[2] "In Mauchline there dwells six proper young belles,
The pride of the place and its neighbourhood a';
Their carriage and dress a stranger would guess,
In Lon'on or Paris they'd gotten it a':

"*Miss Miller* is fine, *Miss Markland's* divine,
Miss Smith she has wit, and *Miss Betty* is braw;
There's beauty and fortune to get wi' *Miss Morton*,
But *Armour's* the jewel for me o' them a'."

consequences of such indiscretions, cannot be denied; nor, perhaps, is there any class of society in any country, in which *matrimonial* infidelity is less known than among the female peasantry of Scotland.

Burns's worldly circumstances were in a most miserable state when he was informed of Miss Armour's condition; and the first announcement of it staggered him like a blow. He saw nothing for it but to fly the country at once; and, in a note to James Smith of Mauchline, the confident of his amour, he thus wrote:—"Against two things I am fixed as fate—staying at home, and owning her conjugally. The first, by Heaven, I will not do!—the last, by hell, I will never do!—A good God bless you, and make you happy, up to the warmest weeping wish of parting friendship. . . . If you see Jean, tell her I will meet her, so help me God in my hour of need."

The lovers met accordingly; and the result of the meeting was what was to be anticipated from the tenderness and the manliness of Burns's feelings. All dread of personal inconvenience yielded at once to the tears of the woman he loved, and, ere they parted, he gave into her keeping a written acknowledgment of marriage, which, when produced by a person in Miss Armour's condition, is, according to the Scots law, to be accepted as legal evidence of an *irregular* marriage having really taken place; it being of course understood that the marriage was to be formally avowed as soon as the consequences of their imprudence could no longer be concealed from her family.

The disclosure was deferred to the last moment, and it was received by the father of Miss Armour with equal surprise and anger. Burns, confessing himself to be unequal to the maintenance of a family, proposed to go immediately to Jamaica, where he hoped to find better fortunes. He offered, if this were rejected, to abandon his farm, which was by this time a hopeless concern, and earn bread at least for his wife and children as a daily labourer at home; but nothing could appease the indignation of Armour, who, Professor Walker hints, had entertained previously a very bad opinion of Burns's whole character. By what arguments he prevailed on his

daughter to take so strange and so painful a step we know not; but the fact is certain, that, at his urgent entreaty, she destroyed the document,[1] which must have been to her the most precious of her possessions—the only evidence of her marriage.

It was under such extraordinary circumstances that Miss Armour became the mother of twins.

Burns's love and pride, the two most powerful feelings

[1] The comments of the Rev. Hamilton Paul, on this delicate part of the poet's story, are too meritorious to be omitted.

"The scenery of the Ayr," says he, "from Sorn to the ancient burgh at its mouth, though it may be equalled in grandeur, is scarcely anywhere surpassed in beauty. To trace its meanders, to wander amid its green woods, to lean over its precipitous and rocky banks, to explore its coves, to survey its Gothic towers, and to admire its modern edifices, is not only highly delightful, but truly inspiring. If the poet, in his excursions along the banks of the river, or in penetrating into the deepest recesses of the grove, be accompanied by his favourite fair one, whose admiration of rural and sylvan beauty is akin to his own, however hazardous the experiment, the bliss is ecstatic. To warn the young and unsuspecting of their danger, is only to stimulate their curiosity. The well-meant dissuasive of Thomson is more seductive in its tendency than the admirers of that poet's morality are aware—

'Ah! then, ye Fair,
Be greatly cautious of your sliding hearts;
Dare not the infectious sigh—nor in the bower,
Where woodbines flaunt, and roses shed a couch,
While evening draws her crimson curtains round,
Trust your soft minutes with betraying man.'

We are decidedly of opinion, that the inexperienced fair will be equally disposed to disregard this sentimental prohibition, and to accept the invitation of another bard, whose libertinism is less disguised,—

'Will you go to the bower I have shaded for you
Your bed shall be roses bespangled with dew.'
. . . . . .
—'To dear deluding woman
The joy of joys,'"

continues this divine, "Burns was partial in the extreme. This was owing, as well to his constitutional temperament, as to the admiration which he drew from the female world, and the facility with which they met his advances. But his aberrations must have been notorious, when a man in the rank of Miss Armour's father refused his consent to his permanent union with his unfortunate daughter. Among the lower classes of the community, subsequent marriage is reckoned an ample atonement for former indiscretion, and antenuptial incontinency is looked upon as scarcely a transgression."

of his mind, had been equally wounded. His anger and grief together drove him, according to every account, to the verge of absolute insanity; and some of his letters on this occasion, both published and unpublished, have certainly all the appearance of having been written in as deep a concentration of despair as ever preceded the most awful of human calamities. His first thought had been, as we have seen, to fly at once from the scene of his disgrace and misery; and this course seemed now to be absolutely necessary. He was summoned to find security for the maintenance of the children whom he was prevented from legitimating, and such was his poverty that he could not satisfy the parish-officers. I suppose security for some four or five pounds a-year was the utmost that could have been demanded from a person of his rank; but the man who had in his desk the immortal poems to which we have been referring above, either disdained to ask, or tried in vain to find, pecuniary assistance in his hour of need; and the only alternative that presented itself to his view was America or a jail.

Who can ever learn without grief and indignation, that it was the victim of *such* miseries who, at such a moment, could pour out such a strain as the *Lament?*

"O thou pale orb, that silent shines,
While care untroubled mortals sleep!
Thou seest a wretch that inly pines,
And wanders here to wail and weep!
With woe I nightly vigils keep,
Beneath thy wan unwarming beam;
And mourn, in lamentation deep,
How *life* and *love* are all a dream.

"No idly-feign'd poetic plaints,
My sad, love-lorn lamentings claim;
No shepherd's pipe—Arcadian strains;
No fabled tortures, quaint and tame:
The plighted faith; the mutual flame;
The oft-attested Pow'rs above;
The *promised Father's tender name;*
These were the pledges of my love!"

CHAPTER IV

"He saw misfortune's cauld *nor'-west*,
Lang mustering up a bitter blast;
A jillet brak his heart at last,
Ill may she be!
So, took a birth afore the mast,
An' owre the sea."

JAMAICA was now his mark, and after some little time, and not a little trouble, the situation of assistant-overseer on the estate of a Dr Douglas in that colony, was procured for him by one of his friends in the town of Irvine. Money to pay for his passage, however, he had not: and it at last occurred to him that the few pounds requisite for this purpose, might be raised by the publication of some of the finest poems that ever delighted mankind.

His landlord, Gavin Hamilton, Mr Aiken, and other friends, encouraged him warmly; and after some hesitation, he at length resolved to hazard an experiment which might perhaps better his circumstances; and, if any tolerable number of subscribers could be procured, could not make them worse than they were already. His rural patrons exerted themselves with success in the matter; and so many copies were soon subscribed for, that Burns entered into terms with a printer in Kilmarnock, and began to copy out his performances for the press. He carried his MSS. piecemeal to the printer; and encouraged by the ray of light which unexpected patronage had begun to throw on his affairs, composed, while the printing was in progress, some of the best poems of the collection. The tale of the *Twa Dogs*, for instance, with which the volume commenced, is known to have been written in the short interval between the publication being determined on and the printing begun. His own account of the business to Dr Moore is as follows:—

"I gave up my part of the farm to my brother: in

truth, it was only nominally mine; and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. But before leaving my native land, I resolved to publish my Poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power: I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver—or, perhaps, a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits. I can truly say that, *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion, that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves.—To know myself, had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others: I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet: I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but, at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, for which I got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty.[1]—My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides, I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want of money to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde; for

'Hungry ruin had me in the wind.'

"I had been for some days skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised

[1] Gilbert Burns mentions that a single individual, Mr William Parker, merchant in Kilmarnock, subscribed for 35 copies.

people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia, *The gloomy night is gathering fast*, when a letter from Dr Blacklock to a friend of mine, overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition."

To the above rapid narrative of the poet, we may annex a few details, gathered from his various biographers and from his own letters.

While his sheets were in the press, it appears, that his friends, Hamilton and Aiken, revolved various schemes for procuring him the means of remaining in Scotland; and having studied some of the practical branches of mathematics, as we have seen, and in particular *gauging*, it occurred to himself that a situation in the Excise might be better suited to him than any other he was at all likely to obtain by the intervention of such patrons as he possessed.

He appears to have lingered longer after the publication of the poems than one might suppose from his own narrative, in the hope that these gentlemen might at length succeed in their efforts in his behalf. The poems were received with favour, even with rapture, in the county of Ayr, and ere long over the adjoining counties. "Old and young," thus speaks Robert Heron, "high and low, grave and gay, learned or ignorant, were alike delighted, agitated, transported. I was at that time resident in Galloway, contiguous to Ayrshire, and I can well remember how even ploughboys and maid-servants would have gladly bestowed the wages they earned the most hardly, and which they wanted to purchase necessary clothing, if they might but procure the Works of Burns."—The poet soon found that his person also had become an object of general curiosity, and that a lively interest in his personal fortunes was excited among some of the gentry of the district, when the details of his story reached them, as it was pretty sure to do, along with his modest and manly preface.[1] Among

[1] *Preface to the First Edition.*

"The following trifles are not the production of the poet, who, with all the advantages of learned art, and, perhaps, amid the elegancies

others, the celebrated Professor Dugald Stewart of Edinburgh, and his accomplished lady, then resident at their beautiful seat of Catrine, began to notice him with much

and idleness of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocritus or Virgil. To the author of this, these and other celebrated names their countrymen are, at least in their original language, *a fountain shut up, and a book sealed.* Unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners he felt and saw in himself and rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language. Though a rhymer from his earliest years, at least from the earliest impulse of the softer passions, it was not till very lately that the applause, perhaps the partiality, of friendship, wakened his vanity so far as to make him think anything of his worth showing; and none of the following works were composed with a view to the press. To amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the toil and fatigues of a laborious life; to transcribe the various feelings, the loves, the griefs, the hopes, the fears, in his own breast; to find some kind of counterpoise to the struggles of a world, always an alien scene, a task uncouth to the poetical mind—these were his motives for courting the Muses, and in these he found poetry to be its own reward.

"Now that he appears in the public character of an author he does it with fear and trembling. So dear is fame to the rhyming tribe, that even he, an obscure, nameless bard, shrinks aghast at the thought of being branded as—An impertinent blockhead, obtruding his nonsense on the world; and, because he can make a shift to jingle a few doggerel Scotch rhymes together, looking upon himself as a poet of no small consequence, forsooth!

"It is an observation of that celebrated poet, Shenstone, whose divine elegies do honour to our language, our nation, and our species, that '*Humility* has depressed many a genius to a hermit, but never raised one to fame!' If any critic catches at the word *genius*, the author tells him once for all, that he certainly looks upon himself as possessed of some poetic abilities, otherwise his publishing in the manner he has done, would be a manœuvre below the worst character, which, he hopes, his worst enemy will ever give him. But to the genius of a Ramsay, or the glorious dawnings of the poor, unfortunate Fergusson, he, with equal unaffected sincerity, declares, that, even in his highest pulse of vanity, he has not the most distant pretensions. These two justly admired Scotch poets he has often had in his eye in the following pieces; but rather with a view to kindle at their flame, than for servile imitation.

"To his subscribers, the author returns his most sincere thanks. Not the mercenary bow over a counter, but the heart-throbbing gratitude of the bard, conscious how much he owes to benevolence and friendship for gratifying him, if he deserves it, in that dearest wish of every poetic bosom—to be distinguished. He begs his readers, particularly the learned and the polite, who may honour him with a perusal, that they will make every allowance for education and

polite and friendly attention. Dr Hugh Blair, who then held an eminent place in the literary society of Scotland, happened to be paying Mr Stewart a visit, and, on reading *The Holy Fair*, at once pronounced it the "work of a very great genius;" and Mrs Stewart, herself a poetess, flattered him perhaps still more highly by her warm commendations. But, above all, his little volume happened to attract the notice of Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, a lady of high birth and ample fortune, enthusiastically attached to her country, and interested in whatever appeared to concern the honour of Scotland. This excellent woman, while slowly recovering from the languor of an illness, laid her hands accidentally on the new production of the provincial press, and opened the volume at *The Cottar's Saturday Night*. "She read it over," says Gilbert, "with the greatest pleasure and surprise; the poet's description of the simple cottagers operated on her mind like the charm of a powerful exorcist, repelling the demon ennui, and restoring her to her wonted inward harmony and satisfaction." Mrs Dunlop instantly sent an express to Mossgiel, distant sixteen miles from her residence, with a very kind letter to Burns, requesting him to supply her, if he could, with half-a-dozen copies of the book, and to call at Dunlop as soon as he could find it convenient. Burns was from home, but he acknowledged the favour conferred on him in an interesting letter, still extant; and shortly afterwards commenced a personal acquaintance with one that never afterwards ceased to befriend him to the utmost of her power. His letters to Mrs Dunlop form a very large proportion of all his subsequent correspondence, and, addressed as they were to a person, whose sex, age, rank, and benevolence, inspired at once profound respect and a graceful confidence, will ever remain the most pleasing of all the materials of our poet's biography.

At the residences of these new acquaintances, Burns was introduced into society of a class which he had not before approached; and of the manner in which he stood the trial, Mr Stewart thus writes to Dr Currie:—

rcumstances of life; but if, after a fair, candid, and impartial iticism, he shall stand convicted of dulness and nonsense, let him be one by as he would in that case do by others—let him be con-emned, without mercy, to contempt and oblivion."

"His manners were then, as they continued ever afterwards, simple, manly, and independent; strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth; but without anything that indicated forwardness, arrogance, or vanity. He took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him; and listened, with apparent attention and deference, on subjects where his want of education deprived him of the means of information. If there had been a little more of gentleness and accommodation in his temper, he would, I think, have been still more interesting; but he had been accustomed to give law in the circle of his ordinary acquaintance; and his dread of anything approaching to meanness or servility, rendered his manner somewhat decided and hard. Nothing, perhaps, was more remarkable among his various attainments than the fluency, and precision, and originality of his language, when he spoke in company, more particularly as he aimed at purity in his turn of expression, and avoided, more successfully than most Scotchmen, the peculiarities of Scottish phraseology. At this time, Burns's prospects in life were so extremely gloomy, that he had seriously formed a plan of going out to Jamaica in a very humble situation, not, however, without lamenting that his want of patronage should force him to think of a project so repugnant to his feelings, when his ambition aimed at no higher an object than the station of an exciseman or gauger in his own country."

The provincial applause of his publication, and the consequent notice of his superiors, however flattering such things must have been, were far from administering any essential relief to the urgent necessities of Burns's situation. Very shortly after his first visit to Catrine, where he met with the young and amiable Basil Lord Daer, whose condescension and kindness on the occasion he celebrates in some well-known verses, we find the poet writing to his friend, Mr Aiken of Ayr, in the following sad strain:—"I have been feeling all the various rotations and movements within respecting the excise. There are many things plead strongly against it; the uncertainty of getting soon into business, the consequences of my follies, which may perhaps make it impracticable for me to stay at home; and besides, I have for some time been pining under secret

wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals, like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society, or the vagaries of the muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad; and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances everything that can be laid in the scale against it."

He proceeds to say, that he claims no right to complain. "The world has in general been kind to me, fully up to my deserts. I was for some time past fast getting into the pining distrustful snarl of the misanthrope. I saw myself alone, unfit for the struggle of life, shrinking at every rising cloud in the chance-directed atmosphere of fortune, while, all defenceless, I looked about in vain for a cover. It never occurred to me, at least never with the force it deserved, that this world is a busy scene, and man a creature destined for a progressive struggle; and that, however I might possess a warm heart, and inoffensive manners (which last, by the by, was rather more than I could well boast) still, more than these passive qualities, there was something to be *done*. When all my school-fellows and youthful compeers were striking off, with eager hope and earnest intent, on some one or other of the many paths of busy life, I was 'standing idle in the market-place,' or only left the chase of the butterfly from flower to flower, to hunt fancy from whim to whim. You see, sir, that if to *know* one's errors, were a probability of *mending* them, I stand a fair chance; but, according to the reverend Westminster divines, though conviction must precede conversion, it is very far from always implying it."

In the midst of all the distresses of this period of suspense, Burns found time, as he tells Mr Aiken, for some "vagaries of the muse;" and one or two of these may deserve to be noticed here, as throwing light on his personal demeanour during this first summer of his fame. The poems appeared in July, and one of the first persons of superior condition (Gilbert, indeed, says *the* first) who

courted his acquaintance in consequence of having read them, was Mrs Stewart of Stair, a beautiful and accomplished lady. Burns presented her on this occasion with some MSS. songs; and among the rest, with one in which her own charms were celebrated in that warm strain of compliment which our poet seems to have all along considered the most proper to be used whenever fair lady was to be addressed in rhyme.

"Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise:
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.
How pleasant thy banks and green valleys below,
Where wild in the woodlands the primroses blow;
There oft, as mild evening sweeps over the lea,
The sweet-scented birk shades my Mary and me."

It was in the spring of the same year, that he had happened, in the course of an evening ramble on the banks of the Ayr, to meet with a young and lovely unmarried lady, of the family of Alexander of Ballochmyle; and now (Sept. 1786) emboldened, we are to suppose, by the reception his volume had met with, he enclosed to her some verses, which he had written in commemoration of that passing glimpse of her beauty, and conceived in a strain of luxurious fervour, which certainly, coming from a man of Burns's station and character, must have sounded very strangely in a delicate maiden's ear.

"Oh, had she been a country maid,
And I the happy country swain,
Though shelter'd in the lowest shed,
That ever rose on Scotia's plain!
Through weary winter's wind and rain,
With joy, with rapture, I would toil,
And nightly to my bosom strain
The bonny lass of Ballochmyle."

Burns is said by Allan Cunningham to have resented bitterly the silence in which Miss Alexander received this tribute to her charms. I suppose we may account for his over tenderness to young ladies in pretty much the same way that Professor Dugald Stewart does, in the letter above quoted, for "a certain want of gentleness" in his

method of addressing persons of his own sex. His rustic experience among the fair could have had no tendency to whisper the lesson of reserve.

The autumn of this eventful year was now drawing to a close, and Burns, who had already lingered three months in the hope, which he now considered vain, of an excise appointment, perceived that another year must be lost altogether, unless he made up his mind, and secured his passage to the West Indies. The Kilmarnock edition of his poems was, however, nearly exhausted; and his friends encouraged him to produce another at the same place, with the view of equipping himself the better for the necessities of his voyage. But the printer at Kilmarnock would not undertake the new impression unless Burns advanced the price of the paper required for it; and with this demand the poet had no means of complying. Mr Ballantyne, the chief magistrate of Ayr (the same gentleman to whom the poem on the *Twa Brigs of Ayr* was afterwards inscribed), offered to furnish the money; and probably this kind offer would have been accepted. But, ere this matter could be arranged, the prospects of the poet were, in a very unexpected manner, altered and improved.

Burns went to pay a parting visit to Dr Laurie, minister of Loudoun, a gentleman from whom, and his accomplished family, he had previously received many kind attentions. After taking farewell of this benevolent circle, the poet proceeded, as the night was setting in, "to convey his chest," as he says, "so far on the road to Greenock, where he was to embark in a few days for America." And it was under these circumstances that he composed the song already referred to, which he meant as his farewell dirge to his native land, and which ends thus:—

"Farewell, old Coila's hills and dales,
Her heathy moors and winding vales,
The scenes where wretched fancy roves,
Pursuing past unhappy loves.
Farewell, my friends! farewell, my foes!
My peace with these—my love with those—
The bursting tears my heart declare,
Farewell, the bonny banks of Ayr."

Dr Laurie had given Burns much good counsel, and what comfort he could, at parting; but prudently said nothing of an effort which he had previously made in his behalf. He had sent a copy of the poems, with a sketch of the author's history, to his friend Dr Thomas Blacklock of Edinburgh, with a request that he would introduce both to the notice of those persons whose opinions were at the time most listened to in regard to literary productions in Scotland, in the hope that, by their intervention, Burns might yet be rescued from the necessity of expatriating himself. Dr Blacklock's answer reached Dr Laurie a day or two after Burns had made his visit, and composed his dirge; and it was not yet too late. Laurie forwarded it immediately to Mr Gavin Hamilton, who carried it to Burns. It is as follows:—

"I ought to have acknowledged your favour long ago, not only as a testimony of your kind remembrance, but as it gave me an opportunity of sharing one of the finest, and perhaps one of the most genuine entertainments of which the human mind is susceptible. A number of avocations retarded my progress in reading the poems; at last, however, I have finished that pleasing perusal. Many instances have I seen of Nature's force or beneficence exerted under numerous and formidable disadvantages; but none equal to that with which you have been kind enough to present me. There is a pathos and delicacy in his serious poems, a vein of wit and humour in those of a more festive turn, which cannot be too much admired, nor too warmly approved; and I think I shall never open the book without feeling my astonishment renewed and increased. It was my wish to have expressed my approbation in verse; but whether from declining life, or a temporary depression of spirits, it is at present out of my power to accomplish that agreeable intention.

"Mr Stewart, Professor of Morals in this University, had formerly read me three of the poems, and I had desired him to get my name inserted among the subscribers; but whether this was done, or not, I never could learn. I have little intercourse with Dr Blair, but will take care to have the poems communicated to him by the intervention of some mutual friend. It has been told me

by a gentleman, to whom I showed the performances, and who sought a copy with diligence and ardour, that the whole impression is already exhausted. It were, therefore, much to be wished, for the sake of the young man, that a second edition, more numerous than the former, could immediately be printed: as it appears certain that its intrinsic merit, and the exertion of the author's friends, might give it a more universal circulation than anything of the kind which has been published in my memory."[1]

We have already seen with what surprise and delight Burns read this generous letter. Although he had ere this conversed with more than one person of established literary reputation, and received from them attentions, for which he was ever after grateful,—the despondency of his spirit appears to have remained as dark as ever, up to the very hour when his landlord produced Dr Blacklock's letter; and one may be pardoned for fancying, that in his *Vision*, he has himself furnished no unfaithful representation of the manner in which he was spending what he looked on as one of the last nights, if not the very last, he was to pass at Mossgiel, when the friendly Hamilton unexpectedly entered the melancholy dwelling.

"There, lanely by the ingle-cheek
I sat and eyed the spewing reek,
That fill'd, wi' hoast-provoking reek,
The auld clay-biggin',
And heard the restless rattans squeak
About the riggin'.

All in this mottie mistie clime,
I backward mused on wasted time,
How I had spent my youthfu' prime,
An' done nae thing,
But stringin' blethers up in rhyme
For fools to sing.

Had I to gude advice but harkit,
I might by this hae led a market,
Or strutted in a bank an' clarkit
My cash-account,
While here, half-mad, half-fed, half-sarkit,
Is a' the amount."

"Doctor Blacklock," says Burns, "belonged to a set of

[1] *Reliques*, p. 279.

critics, for whose *applause* I had not *dared to hope*. His opinion that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith, for once made a revolution to the nadir."[1]

Two of the biographers of Burns have had the advantage of speaking from personal knowledge of the excellent man whose interposition was thus serviceable. "It was a fortunate circumstance," says Walker, "that the person whom Dr Laurie applied to, merely because he was the only one of his literary acquaintances with whom he chose to use that freedom, happened also to be the person best qualified to render the application successful. Dr Blacklock was an enthusiast in his admiration of an art which he had practised himself with applause. He felt the claims of a poet with a paternal sympathy, and he had in his constitution a tenderness and sensibility that would have engaged his beneficence for a youth in the circumstances of Burns, even though he had not been indebted to him for the delight which he received from his works; for if the young men were enumerated whom he drew from obscurity, and enabled by education to advance themselves in life, the catalogue would naturally excite surprise. . . . He was not of a disposition to act as Walpole did to Chatterton; to discourage with feeble praise, and to shift off the trouble of future patronage, by bidding him relinquish poetry, and mind his plough."[2]

"There was never, perhaps," thus speaks the unfortunate Heron, whose own unmerited sorrows and sufferings would not have left so dark a stain on the literary history of Scotland, had the kind spirit of Blacklock been common among his lettered countrymen —"There was never, perhaps, one among all mankind whom you might more truly have called *an angel upon earth* than Dr Blacklock. He was guileless and innocent as a child, yet endowed with manly sagacity and penetration. His heart was a perpetual spring of benignity.

[1] Letter to Moore.
[2] Morrison, vol. i. p. 9.

His feelings were all tremblingly alive to the sense of the sublime, the beautiful, the tender, the pious, the virtuous. Poetry was to him the dear solace of perpetual blindness."

Such was the amiable old man, whose life Mackenzie has written, and on whom Johnson "looked with reverence."[1] The writings of Blacklock are forgotten (though some of his songs in *the Museum* deserve another fate), but the memory of his virtues will not pass away until mankind shall have ceased to sympathise with the fortunes of Genius, and to appreciate the poetry of Burns.

[1] "This morning I saw at breakfast Dr Blacklock the blind poet, who does not remember to have seen light, and is read to by a poor scholar in Latin, Greek, and French. He was originally a poor scholar himself. I looked on him with reverence." Letter to Mrs Thrale. Edinburgh, August 17, 1773.

CHAPTER V

"Edina! Scotia's darling seat!
All hail thy palaces and tow'rs,
Where once beneath a monarch's feet
Sat Legislation's sovereign powers;
From marking wildly-scatter'd flow'rs,
As on the banks of Ayr I stray'd,
And singing, lone, the lingering hours,
I shelter in thy honour'd shade."

THERE is an old Scottish ballad which begins thus:—

"As I came in by Glenap,
I met an aged woman,
And she bade me cheer up my heart,
For the best of my days was coming."

This stanza was one of Burns's favourite quotations; and he told a friend[1] many years afterwards, that he remembered humming it to himself, over and over, on his way from Mossgiel to Edinburgh. Perhaps the excellent Blacklock might not have been particularly flattered with the circumstance had it reached his ears.

Although he repaired to the capital with such alertness, solely in consequence of Blacklock's letter to Dr Laurie, it appears that he allowed some weeks to pass ere he presented himself to the doctor's personal notice.[2] He found several of his old Ayrshire acquaintances established in Edinburgh, and, I suppose, felt himself constrained to give himself up for a brief space to their society. He printed, however, without delay, a prospectus of a second edition of his poems, and being introduced by Mr Dalrymple of Orangefield to the Earl of Glencairn, that amiable nobleman easily persuaded Creech, then the chief bookseller in Edinburgh (who had attended his son

[1] David Macculloch, Esq., brother to Ardwell.

[2] Burns reached Edinburgh before the end of November, and yet Dr Laurie's letter (General Correspondence, p. 37), admonishing him to wait on Blacklock, is dated December 22.

as travelling-tutor), to undertake the publication. The Honourable Henry Erskine, Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, the most agreeable of companions, and the most benignant of wits, took him also, as the poet expresses it, "under his wing." The kind Blacklock received him with all the warmth of paternal affection when he did wait on him, and introduced him to Dr Blair, and other eminent *literati;* his subscription lists were soon filled; Lord Glencairn made interest with the Caledonian Hunt (an association of the most distinguished members of the northern aristocracy), to accept the dedication of the forthcoming edition, and to subscribe individually for copies. Several noblemen, especially of the west of Scotland, came forward with subscription-moneys considerably beyond the usual rate. In so small a capital, where everybody knows everybody, that which becomes a favourite topic in one leading circle of society, soon excites an universal interest; and before Burns had been a fortnight in Edinburgh, we find him writing to his earliest patron, Gavin Hamilton, in these terms:—"For my own affairs, I am in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas a Kempis or John Bunyan; and you may expect henceforth to see my birthday inscribed among the wonderful events in the Poor Robin and Aberdeen Almanacks, along with the Black Monday, and the Battle of Bothwell Bridge."

It will ever be remembered, to the honour of the man who at that period held the highest place in the imaginative literature of Scotland, that he was the first who came forward to avow in print his admiration of the genius and his warm interest in the fortunes of the poet. Distinguished as his own writings are by the refinements of classical art, Mr Henry Mackenzie was, fortunately for Burns, a man of liberal genius, as well as polished taste; and he, in whose own pages some of the best models of elaborate elegance will ever be recognised, was among the first to feel, and the first to stake his own reputation on the public avowal, that *The Ayrshire Ploughman* belonged to the order of beings, whose privilege it is to snatch graces "beyond the reach of art." It is but a melancholy business to trace among the records of

literary history, the manner in which most great original geniuses have been greeted on their first appeals to the world, by the contemporary arbiters of taste; coldly and timidly indeed have the sympathies of professional criticism flowed on most such occasions in past times and in the present: But the reception of Burns was worthy of *the Man of Feeling*. After alluding to the provincial circulation and reputation of his poems,[1] "I hope," said the *Lounger*, "I shall not be thought to assume too much, if I endeavour to place him in a higher point of view, to call for a verdict of his country on the merits of his works, and to claim for him those honours which their excellence appears to deserve. In mentioning the circumstance of his humble station, I mean not to rest his pretensions solely on that title, or to urge the merits of his poetry, when considered in relation to the lowness of his birth, and the little opportunity of improvement which his education could afford. These particulars, indeed, must excite our wonder at his productions; but his poetry, considered abstractedly, and without the apologies arising from his situation, seems to me fully entitled to command our feelings, and to obtain our applause." . . . After quoting various passages, in some of which his readers "must discover a high tone of feeling, and power, and energy of expression, particularly and strongly characteristic of the mind and the voice of a poet," and others as showing "the power of genius, not less admirable in tracing the manners, than in painting the passions, or in drawing the scenery of nature," and "with what uncommon penetration and sagacity this heaven-taught ploughman, from his humble and unlettered condition, had looked on men and manners," the critic concluded with an eloquent appeal in behalf of the poet personally: "To repair," said he, "the wrong of suffering or neglected merit; to call forth genius from the obscurity in which it had pined indignant, and place it where it may profit or delight the world—these are exertions which give to wealth an enviable superiority, to greatness and to patronage a laudable pride."

We all know how the serious part of this appeal was ultimately attended to; but, in the meantime, whatever

[1] The *Lounger* for Saturday, December 9, 1786.

gratification such a mind as his could derive from the blandishments of the fair, the condescension of the noble, and the flatteries of the learned, were plentifully administered to "the Lion" of the season.

"I was, sir," thus wrote Burns to one of his Ayrshire patrons,[1] a few days after the *Lounger* appeared,—"I was, when first honoured with your notice, too obscure; now I tremble lest I should be ruined by being dragged too suddenly into the glare of polite and learned observation;" and he concludes the same letter with an ominous prayer for "better health and more spirits."

Two or three weeks later, we find him writing as follows:—"(January 14, 1787.) I went to a Mason Lodge yesternight, where the M.W. Grandmaster Charteris and all the Grand Lodge of Scotland visited. The meeting was numerous and elegant: all the different lodges about town were present in all their pomp. The Grand Master, who presided with great solemnity, among other general toasts gave 'Caledonia and Caledonia's bard, Brother B——,' which rung through the whole assembly with multiplied honours and repeated acclamations. As I had no idea such a thing would happen, I was downright thunderstruck: and trembling in every nerve, made the best return in my power. Just as I had finished, one of the Grand Officers said, so loud that I could hear, with a most comforting accent, 'very well indeed,' which set me something to rights again."

And a few weeks later still, he is thus addressed by one of his old associates, who was meditating a visit to Edinburgh. "By all accounts, it will be a difficult matter to get a sight of you at all, unless your company is bespoke a week beforehand. There are great rumours here of your intimacy with the Duchess of Gordon, and other ladies of distinction. I am really told that

'Cards to invite, fly by thousands each night;'

and if you had one, there would also, I suppose, be 'bribes for your old secretary.' I observe you are resolved to make hay while the sun shines, and avoid, if

[1] Letter to Mr Ballantyne of Ayr, December 13, 1786. *Reliques*, p. 12.

possible, the fate of poor Ferguson. *Quærenda pecunia primum est—Virtus post nummos*, is a good maxim to thrive by. You seemed to despise it while in this country; but, probably, some philosophers in Edinburgh have taught you better sense."

In this proud career, however, the popular idol needed no slave to whisper whence he had risen, and whither he was to return in the ebb of the spring-tide of fortune. His "prophetic soul" was probably furnished with a sufficient memento every night—when, from the soft homage of glittering saloons, or the tumultuous applause of convivial assemblies, he made his retreat to the humble garret of a *writer's* apprentice, a native of Mauchline, and as poor as himself, whose only bed "Caledonia's Bard" was fain to partake throughout this triumphant winter.[1]

He bore all his honours in a manner worthy of himself; and of this the testimonies are so numerous, that the only difficulty is that of selection. "The attentions he received," says Mr Dugald Stewart, "from all ranks and descriptions of persons, were such as would have turned any head but his own. I cannot say that I could perceive any unfavourable effect which they left on his mind. He retained the same simplicity of manners and appearance which had struck me so forcibly when I first saw him in the country; nor did he seem to feel any additional self-importance from the number and rank of his new acquaintance."

Professor Walker, who met him, for the first time, early in the same season, at breakfast in Dr Blacklock's house, has thus recorded his impressions:—"I was not much struck with his first appearance, as I had previously heard it described. His person, though strong and well knit, and much superior to what might be expected in a ploughman, was still rather coarse in its outline. His stature, from want of setting up, appeared to be only of

[1] "Old Mr Richmond of Mauchline, told me that Burns spent the first winter of his residence in Edinburgh, in his lodgings. They slept in the same bed, and had only one room. It was in the house of a Mrs Carfrae, Baxter's Close, Lawnmarket, first scale-stair on the left hand in going down, first door in the stair." I quote from a letter of Mr R. Chambers, the diligent local antiquary of Edinburgh to whom I owe many obligations.

the middle size, but was rather above it. His motions were firm and decided, and though without any pretensions to grace, were at the same time so free from clownish constraint, as to show that he had not always been confined to the society of his profession. His countenance was not of that elegant cast, which is most frequent among the upper ranks, but it was manly and intelligent, and marked by a thoughtful gravity which shaded at times into sternness. In his large dark eye the most striking index of his genius resided. It was full of mind; and would have been singularly expressive, under the management of one who could employ it with more art, for the purpose of expression.

"He was plainly, but properly dressed, in a style midway between the holiday costume of a farmer, and that of the company with which he now associated. His black hair, without powder, at a time when it was very generally worn, was tied behind, and spread upon his forehead. Upon the whole, from his person, physiognomy, and dress, had I met him near a seaport, and been required to guess his condition, I should have probably conjectured him to be the master of a merchant vessel of the most respectable class.

"In no part of his manner was there the slightest degree of affectation, nor could a stranger have suspected, from anything in his behaviour or conversation, that he had been for some months the favourite of all the fashionable circles of a metropolis.

"In conversation he was powerful. His conceptions and expression were of corresponding vigour, and on all subjects were as remote as possible from common places. Though somewhat authoritative, it was in a way which gave little offence, and was readily imputed to his inexperience in those modes of smoothing dissent and softening assertion, which are important characteristics of polished manners. After breakfast I requested him to communicate some of his unpublished pieces, and he recited his farewell song to the Banks of Ayr, introducing it with a description of the circumstances in which it was composed, more striking than the poem itself.

"I paid particular attention to his recitation, which was

plain, slow, articulate, and forcible, but without any eloquence or art. He did not always lay the emphasis with propriety, nor did he humour the sentiment by the variations of his voice. He was standing, during the time, with his face towards the window, to which, and not to his auditors, he directed his eye—thus depriving himself of any additional effect which the language of his composition might have borrowed from the language of his countenance. In this he resembled the generality of singers in ordinary company, who, to shun any charge of affectation, withdraw all meaning from their features, and lose the advantage by which vocal performers on the stage augment the impression, and give energy to the sentiment of the song. . . .

"The day after my first introduction to Burns, I supped in company with him at Dr Blair's. The other guests were very few, and as each had been invited chiefly to have an opportunity of meeting with the poet, the Doctor endeavoured to draw him out, and to make him the central figure of the group. Though he therefore furnished the greatest proportion of the conversation, he did no more than what he saw evidently was expected."[1]

To these reminiscences I shall now add those of one who is not likely to be heard unwillingly on any subject; and—young as he was in 1786—on few subjects, I think, with greater interest than the personal appearance and conversation of Robert Burns. The following is an extract from a letter of Sir Walter Scott:—

"As for Burns, I may truly say, *Virgilium vidi tantum*. I was a lad of fifteen in 1786-7, when he came first to Edinburgh, but had sense and feeling enough to be much interested in his poetry, and would have given the world to know him; but I had very little acquaintance with any literary people, and still less with the gentry of the west country, the two sets that he most frequented. Mr Thomas Grierson was at that time a clerk of my father's. He knew Burns, and promised to ask him to his lodgings to dinner, but had no opportunity to keep his word; otherwise I might have seen more of this distinguished man. As it was, I saw him one day at the late venerable

[1] Morrison's *Burns*, vol. i. pp. lxxi., lxxii.

Professor Fergusson's, where there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among whom I remember the celebrated Mr Dugald Stewart. Of course we youngsters sate silent, looked, and listened. The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns's manner, was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one side,—on the other, his widow, with a child in her arms. These lines were written beneath :—

'Cold on Canadian hills, or Minden's plain,
Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain—
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops, mingling with the milk he drew,
Gave the sad presage of his future years,
The child of misery baptised in tears.'

"Burns seemed much affected by the print, or rather the ideas which it suggested to his mind. He actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were, and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's, called by the unpromising title of The Justice of Peace. I whispered my information to a friend present, who mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word, which, though of mere civility, I then received, and still recollect, with very great pleasure.

"His person was strong and robust; his manners rustic, not clownish; a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity, which received part of its effect, perhaps, from one's knowledge of his extraordinary talents. His features are represented in Mr Nasmyth's picture, but to me it conveys the idea, that they are diminished as if seen in perspective. I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits. I would have taken the poet, had I not known what he was, for a very sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch school, *i.e.* none of your modern agriculturists, who keep labourers for their drudgery, but the *douce gudeman* who held his own plough. There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large, and of a dark

cast, which glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time. His conversation expressed perfect self-confidence, without the slightest presumption. Among the men who were the most learned of their time and country, he expressed himself with perfect firmness, but without the least intrusive forwardness; and when he differed in opinion, he did not hesitate to express it firmly, yet at the same time with modesty. I do not remember any part of his conversation distinctly enough to be quoted, nor did I ever see him again, except in the street, where he did not recognise me, as I could not expect he should. He was much caressed in Edinburgh, but (considering what literary emoluments have been since his day) the efforts made for his relief were extremely trifling.

"I remember on this occasion I mention, I thought Burns's acquaintance with English Poetry was rather limited, and also, that having twenty times the abilities of Allan Ramsay and of Ferguson, he talked of them with too much humility as his models; there was, doubtless, national predilection in his estimate.

"This is all I can tell you about Burns. I have only to add, that his dress corresponded with his manner. He was like a farmer dressed in his best to dine with the Laird. I do not speak in *malam partem*, when I say, I never saw a man in company with his superiors in station and information, more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment. I was told, but did not observe it, that his address to females was extremely deferential, and always with a turn either to the pathetic or humorous, which engaged their attention particularly. I have heard the late Duchess of Gordon remark this.—I do not know anything I can add to these recollections of forty years since."

Darkly as the career of Burns was destined to terminate, there can be no doubt that he made his first appearance at a period highly favourable for his reception as a British, and especially as a Scottish poet. Nearly forty years had elapsed since the death of Thomson:—Collins, Gray, Goldsmith, had successively disappeared:—Dr Johnson

had belied the rich promise of his early appearance, and confined himself to prose; and Cowper had hardly begun to be recognised as having any considerable pretensions to fill the long-vacant throne in England. At home—without derogation from the merits either of *Douglas* or the *Minstrel*, be it said—men must have gone back at least three centuries to find a Scottish poet at all entitled to be considered as of that high order to which the generous criticism of Mackenzie at once admitted "the Ayrshire Ploughman." Of the form and garb of his composition, much, unquestionably and avowedly, was derived from his more immediate predecessors, Ramsay and Ferguson: but there was a bold mastery of hand in his picturesque descriptions, to produce anything equal to which it was necessary to recall the days of *Christ's Kirk on the Green*, and *Peebles to the Play:* and in his more solemn pieces, a depth of inspiration, and a massive energy of language, to which the dialect of his country had been a stranger, at least since "Dunbar the Mackar." The Muses of Scotland had never indeed been silent; and the ancient minstrelsy of the land, of which a slender portion had as yet been committed to the safeguard of the press, was handed from generation to generation, and preserved, in many a fragment, faithful images of the peculiar tenderness, and peculiar humour, of the national fancy and character—precious representations, which Burns himself never surpassed in his happiest efforts. But these were fragments; and with a scanty handful of exceptions, the best of them, at least of the serious kind, were very ancient. Among the numberless effusions of the Jacobite Muse, valuable as we now consider them for the record of manners and events, it would be difficult to point out half-a-dozen strains, worthy, for poetical excellence alone, of a place among the old chivalrous ballads of the Southern, or even of the Highland Border. Generations had passed away since any Scottish poet had appealed to the sympathies of his countrymen in a lofty Scottish strain.

The dialect itself had been hardly dealt with. "It is my opinion," said Dr Geddes, "that those who, for almost a century past, have written in Scotch, Allan Ramsay not excepted, have not duly discriminated the genuine idiom

from its vulgarisms. They seem to have acted a similar part to certain pretended imitators of Spenser and Milton, who fondly imagine that they are copying from these great models, when they only mimic their antique mode of spelling, their obsolete terms, and their irregular constructions." And although I cannot well guess what the doctor considered as the irregular constructions of Milton, there can be no doubt of the general justice of his observations. Ramsay and Ferguson were both men of humble condition, the latter of the meanest, the former of no very elegant habits; and the dialect which had once pleased the ears of kings, who themselves did not disdain to display its powers and elegancies in verse, did not come untarnished through their hands. Ferguson, who was entirely town-bred, smells more of the Cowgate than of the country; and pleasing as Ramsay's rustics are, he appears rather to have observed the surface of rural manners, in casual excursions to Penicuik and the Hunter's Tryste, than to have expressed the results of intimate knowledge and sympathy. His dialect was a somewhat incongruous mixture of the Upper Ward of Lanark and the Luckenbooths; and he could neither write English verses, nor engraft English phraseology on his Scotch, without betraying a lamentable want of skill in the use of his instruments. It was reserved for Burns to interpret the inmost soul of the Scottish peasant in all its moods, and in verse exquisitely and intensely Scottish, without degrading either his sentiments or his language with one touch of vulgarity. Such is the delicacy of native taste, and the power of a truly masculine genius.

This is the more remarkable, when we consider that the dialect of Burns's native district is, in all mouths but his own, a peculiarly offensive one:—far removed from that of the favoured districts in which the ancient minstrelsy appears, with rare exceptions, to have been produced. Even in the elder days, it seems to have been proverbial for its coarseness. Dunbar, among other sarcasms on his antagonist Kennedy, says:—

> "I haif on me a pair of Lothiane hipps
> Sall fairer Inglis mak, and mair perfyte,
> Than thou can blabber with thy Carrick lipps;"

and the Covenanters were not likely to mend it. The few poets[1] whom the west of Scotland had produced in the old time, were all men of high condition; and who, of course, used the language, not of their own villages, but of Holyrood. Their productions, moreover, in so far as they have been produced, had nothing to do with the peculiar character and feelings of the men of the west. As Burns himself has said,—"It is somewhat singular, that in Lanark, Renfrew, Ayr, etc., there is scarcely an old song or tune, which, from the title, etc., can be guessed to belong to, or be the production of, those counties."

The history of Scottish literature, from the union of the crowns to that of the kingdoms, has not yet been made the subject of any separate work at all worthy of its importance; nay, however much we are indebted to the learned labours of Pinkerton, Irving, and others, enough of the *general* obscurity of which Warton complained still continues, to the no small discredit of so accomplished a nation. But how miserably the *literature* of the country was affected by the loss of the court under whose immediate patronage it had, in almost all preceding times, found a measure of protection that will ever do honour to the memory of the unfortunate house of Stuart, appears to be indicated with sufficient plainness in the single fact, that no man can point out any Scottish author of the first rank in all the long period which intervened between Buchanan and Hume. The removal of the chief nobility and gentry, consequent on the Legislative Union, appeared to destroy our last hopes as a separate nation, possessing a separate literature of our own; nay, for a time, to have all but extinguished the flame of intellectual exertion and ambition. Long torn and harassed by religious and political feuds, this people had at last heard, as many believed, the sentence of irremediable degradation pronounced by the lips of their own prince and parliament. The universal spirit of Scotland was humbled; the unhappy insurrections of 1715 and 1745 revealed the full

[1] Such as Kennedy, Shaw, Montgomery, and, more lately, Hamilton of Gilbertfield—

> "Who bade the brakes of Airdrie long resound
> The plaintive dirge that mourn'd his favourite hound."

extent of her internal disunion; and England took, in some respects, merciless advantage of the fallen.

Time, however, passed on; and Scotland recovering at last from the blow which had stunned her energies, began to vindicate her pretensions, in the only departments which had been left open to her, with a zeal and a success which will ever distinguish one of the brightest pages of her history. Deprived of every national honour and distinction which it was possible to remove—all the high branches of external ambition lopped off,—sunk at last, as men thought, effectually into a province, willing to take law with passive submission, in letters as well as polity, from her powerful sister—the old kingdom revived suddenly from her stupor, and once more asserted her name in reclamations which England was compelled not only to hear, but to applaud, and "wherewith all Europe rung from side to side," at the moment when a national poet came forward to profit by the reflux of a thousand half-forgotten sympathies—amidst the full joy of a national pride revived and re-established beyond the dream of hope.

It will always reflect honour on the galaxy of eminent men of letters, who, in their various departments, shed lustre at that period on the name of Scotland, that they suffered no pedantic prejudices to interfere with their reception of Burns. Had he not appeared personally among them, it may be reasonably doubted whether this would have been so. They were men, generally speaking, of very social habits; living together in a small capital; nay, almost all of them, in or about one street, maintaining friendly intercourse continually; not a few of them considerably addicted to the pleasures which have been called, by way of excellence, I presume, convivial. Burns's poetry might have procured him access to these circles; but it was the extraordinary resources he displayed in conversation, the strong vigorous sagacity of his observations on life and manners, the splendour of his wit, and the glowing energy of his eloquence when his feelings were stirred, that made him the object of serious admiration among these practised masters of the arts of *talk*. There were several of them who probably adopted in their hearts the opinion of Newton, that "poetry is in-

genious nonsense." Adam Smith, for one, could have had no very ready respect at the service of such an unproductive labourer as a maker of Scottish ballads; but the stateliest of these philosophers had enough to do to maintain the attitude of equality, when brought into personal contact with Burns's gigantic understanding; and every one of them whose impressions on the subject have been recorded, agrees in pronouncing his conversation to have been the most remarkable thing about him.

And yet it is amusing enough to trace the lingering reluctance of some of these polished scholars, about admitting, even to themselves, in his absence, what it is certain they all felt sufficiently when they were actually in his presence. It is difficult, for example, to read without a smile that letter of Mr Dugald Stewart, in which he describes himself and Mr Alison as being surprised to discover that Burns, after reading the latter author's elegant *Essay on Taste*, had really been able to form some shrewd enough notion of the general principles of the association of *ideas*.

Burns would probably have been more satisfied with himself in these learned societies, had he been less addicted to giving free utterance in conversation to the very feelings which formed the noblest inspirations of his poetry. His sensibility was as tremblingly exquisite, as his sense was masculine and solid; and he seems to have ere long suspected that the professional metaphysicians who applauded his rapturous bursts, surveyed them in reality with something of the same feeling which may be supposed to attend a skilful surgeon's inspection of a curious specimen of morbid anatomy. Why should he lay his inmost heart thus open to dissectors, who took special care to keep the knife from their own breasts? The secret blush that overspread his haughty countenance when such suggestions occurred to him in his solitary hours, may be traced in the opening lines of a diary which he began to keep ere he had been long in Edinburgh.

"*April* 9, 1787.—As I have seen a good deal of human life in Edinburgh, a great many characters which are new to one bred up in the shades of life, as I have been, I am

determined to take down my remarks on the spot. Gray observes, in a letter to Mr Palgrave, that, 'half a word fixed, upon, or near the spot, is worth a cart-load of recollection.' I don't know how it is with the world in general, but with me, making my remarks is by no means a solitary pleasure. I want some one to laugh with me, some one to be grave with me, some one to please me and help my discrimination, with his or her own remark, and at times, no doubt, to admire my acuteness and penetration. The world are so busied with selfish pursuits, ambition, vanity, interest, or pleasure, that very few think it worth their while to make any observation on what passes around them, except where that observation is a sucker, or branch, of the darling plant they are rearing in their fancy. Nor am I sure, notwithstanding all *the sentimental flights of novel-writers*, and *the sage philosophy of moralists*, whether we are capable of so intimate and cordial a coalition of friendship, *as that one man may pour out his bosom, his every thought and floating fancy, his very inmost soul, with unreserved confidence, to another, without hazard of losing part of that respect which man deserves from man;* or, from the unavoidable imperfections attending human nature, of one day repenting his confidence.

"For these reasons I am determined to make these pages my confident. I will sketch every character that any way strikes me, to the best of my power, with unshrinking justice. I will insect anedotes, and take down remarks, in the old law phrase, *without feud or favour*.—Where I hit on anything clever, my own applause will, in some measure, feast my vanity; and, begging Patroclus' and Achates' pardon, I think a lock and key a security, at least equal to the bosom of any friend whatever."

And the same lurking thorn of suspicion peeps out elsewhere in this complaint: "I know not how it is; I find I can win *liking*—but not *respect*."

"Burns," says a great living poet, in commenting on the free style, in which Dr Currie did not hesitate to expose some of the weaker parts of his behaviour, very soon after the grave had closed on him,—"Burns was a man of extraordinary genius, whose birth, education, and employments had placed and kept him in a situation far below

that in which the writers and readers of expensive volumes are usually found. Critics upon works of fiction have laid it down as a rule that remoteness of place, in fixing the choice of a subject, and in prescribing the mode of treating it, is equal in effect to distance of time;—restraints may be thrown off accordingly. Judge then of the delusions which artificial distinctions impose, when to a man like Dr Currie, writing with views so honourable, the *social condition* of the individual of whom he was treating, could seem to place him at such a distance from the exalted reader, that ceremony might be discarded with him, and his memory sacrificed, as it were, almost without compunction. This is indeed to be *crushed beneath the furrow's weight.*[1]

It would be idle to suppose that the feelings here ascribed, and justly, no question, to the amiable and benevolent Currie, did not often find their way into the bosoms of those persons of superior condition and attainments, with whom Burns associated at the period when he first emerged into the blaze of reputation; and what found its way into men's bosoms was not likely to avoid betraying itself to the perspicacious glance of the proud peasant. How perpetually he was alive to the dread of being looked down upon as a man, even by those who most zealously applauded the works of his genius, might perhaps be traced through the whole sequence of his letters. When writing to *men* of high station, at least, he preserves, in every instance, the attitude of self-defence. But it is only in his own secret tables that we have the fibres of his heart laid bare; and the cancer of this jealousy is seen distinctly at its painful work: *habemus reum et confitentem.*

"There are few of the sore evils under the sun give me more uneasiness and chagrin than the comparison how a man of genius, nay, of avowed worth, is received everywhere, with the reception which a mere ordinary character, decorated with the trappings and futile distinctions of fortune, meets. I imagine a man of abilities, his breast glowing with honest pride, conscious that men are born equal, still giving *honour to whom honour is due;* he meets, at a great man's table, a Squire something, or a Sir some-

[1] Mr Wordsworth's letter to a friend of Burns, p. 12.

body; he knows the *noble* landlord, at heart, gives the bard, or whatever he is, a share of his good wishes, beyond, perhaps, any one at table; yet how will it mortify him to see a fellow, whose abilities would scarcely have made an *eightpenny tailor*, and whose heart is not worth three farthings, meet with attention and notice, that are withheld from the son of genius and poverty?

"The noble Glencairn has wounded me to the soul here, because I dearly esteem, respect, and love him. He showed so much attention—engrossing attention, one day, to the only blockhead at table (the whole company consisted of his lordship, dunderpate, and myself) that I was within half a point of throwing down my gage of contemptuous defiance; but he shook my hand, and looked so benevolently good at parting—God bless him! though I should never see him more, I shall love him until my dying day! I am pleased to think I am so capable of the throes of gratitude, as I am miserably deficient in some other virtues.

"With Dr Blair I am more at my ease. I never respect him with humble veneration; but when he kindly interests himself in my welfare, or still more, when he descends from his pinnacle, and meets me on equal ground in conversation, my heart overflows with what is called *liking*. When he neglects me for the mere carcass of greatness, or when his eye measures the difference of our points of elevation, I say to myself, with scarcely any emotion, what do I care for him, or his pomp either?"

"It is not easy," says Burns, attempting to be more philosophical—"It is not easy forming an exact judgment of any one; but, in my opinion, Dr Blair is merely an astonishing proof of what industry and application can do. Natural parts like his are frequently to be met with; his vanity is proverbially known among his own acquaintances; but he is justly at the head of what may be called fine writing, and a critic of the first, the very first rank in prose; even in poetry *a bard of nature's making can only take the* pas *of him*. He has a heart, not of the very finest water, but far from being an ordinary one. In short, he is a truly worthy and most respectable character."

"Once," says a nice speculator on the "follies of the

wise,"[1]—"Once we were nearly receiving from the hand of genius the most curious sketches of the temper, the irascible humours, the delicacy of soul, even to its shadowiness, from the warm *sbozzos* of Burns, when he began a diary of his heart—a narrative of characters and events, and a chronology of his emotions. It was natural for such a creature of sensation and passion to project such a regular task, but quite impossible to get through it." This most curious document, it is to be observed, has not yet been printed entire. Another generation will, no doubt, see the whole of the confession; however, what has already been given, it may be surmised, indicates sufficiently the complexion of Burns's prevailing moods during his moments of retirement at this interesting period of his history. It was in such a mood (they recurred often enough) that he thus reproached "Nature, partial nature:"

> "Thou givest the ass his hide, the snail his shell;
> The invenom'd wasp victorious guards his cell:
> But, oh! thou bitter stepmother, and hard,
> To thy poor fenceless naked child, the bard . . .
> *In naked feeling and in aching pride,*
> He bears the unbroken blast from every side."

There was probably no blast that pierced this haughty soul so sharply as the contumely of condescension.

"One of the poet's remarks," as Cromek tells us, "when he first came to Edinburgh, was that between the men of rustic life and the polite world he observed little difference—that in the former, though unpolished by fashion and unenlightened by science, he had found much observation, and much intelligence,—but a refined and accomplished woman was a thing almost new to him, and of which he had formed but a very inadequate idea." To be pleased, is the old and the best receipt how to please; and there is abundant evidence that Burns's success, among the high-born ladies of Edinburgh, was much greater than among the "stately patricians," as he calls them, of his own sex. The vivid expression of one of them has almost become proverbial—that she never met with a man, "whose conversation so completely carried her off her feet," as Burns's; and Sir Walter Scott, in his

[1] D'Israeli on the Literary Character, vol. i. p. 136.

reference to the testimony of the late Duchess of Gordon, has no doubt indicated the two-fold source of the fascination. But even here, he was destined to feel ere long something of the fickleness of fashion. He confessed to one of his old friends, ere the season was over, that some who had caressed him the most zealously, no longer seemed to know him, when he bowed in passing their carriages, and many more acknowledged his salute but coldly.

It is but too true, that ere this season was over, Burns had formed connexions in Edinburgh which could not have been regarded with much approbation by the eminent *literati*, in whose society his *début* had made so powerful an impression. But how much of the blame, if serious blame, indeed, there was in the matter, ought to attach to his own fastidious jealousy—how much to the mere caprice of human favour, we have scanty means of ascertaining: No doubt, both had their share; and it is also sufficiently apparent that there were many points in Burns's conversational habits which men, accustomed to the delicate observances of refined society, might be more willing to tolerate under the first excitement of personal curiosity, than from any very deliberate estimate of the claims of such a genius, under such circumstances developed. He by no means restricted his sarcastic observations on those whom he encountered in the world to the confidence of his note-book; but startled polite ears with the utterance of audacious epigrams, far too witty not to obtain general circulation in so small a society as that of the northern capital, far too bitter not to produce deep resentment, far too numerous not to spread fear almost as widely as admiration. Even when nothing was farther from his thoughts than to inflict pain, his ardour often carried him headlong into sad scrapes: witness, for example, the anecdote given by Professor Walker, of his entering into a long discussion of the merits of the popular preachers of the day, at the table of Dr Blair, and enthusiastically avowing his low opinion of all the rest in comparison with Dr Blair's own colleague and most formidable rival—a man, certainly, endowed with extraordinary graces of voice and manner, a generous and amiable strain of feeling, and a copious flow of language; but having no pretensions

either to the general accomplishments for which Blair was honoured in a most accomplished society, or to the polished elegance which he first introduced into the eloquence of the Scottish pulpit. Mr Walker well describes the unpleasing effects of such an *escapade;* the conversation during the rest of the evening, "labouring under that compulsory effort which was unavoidable, while the thoughts of all were full of the only subject on which it was improper to speak." Burns showed his good sense by making no effort to repair this blunder; but years afterwards, he confessed that he could never recall it without exquisite pain. Mr Walker properly says, it did honour to Dr Blair that his kindness remained totally unaltered by this occurrence; but the Professor would have found nothing to admire in that circumstance, had he not been well aware of the rarity of such good-nature among the *genus irritabile* of authors, orators and wits.

A specimen (which some will think worse, some better) is thus recorded by Cromek:—"At a private breakfast, in a literary circle of Edinburgh, the conversation turned on the poetical merit and pathos of Gray's *Elegy*, a poem of which he was enthusiastically fond. A clergyman present, remarkable for his love of paradox and for his eccentric notions upon every subject, distinguished himself by an injudicious and ill-timed attack on this exquisite poem, which Burns, with generous warmth for the reputation of Gray, manfully defended. As the gentleman's remarks were rather general than specific, Burns urged him to bring forward the passages which he thought exceptionable. He made several attempts to quote the poem, but always in a blundering, inaccurate manner. Burns bore all this for a good while with his usual good-natured forbearance, till at length, goaded by the fastidious criticisms and wretched quibblings of his opponent, he roused himself, and with an eye flashing contempt and indignation, and with great vehemence of gesticulation, he thus addressed the cold critic: 'Sir, I now perceive a man may be an excellent judge of poetry by square and rule, and after all be a d——d blockhead;'"—so far, Mr Cromek; and all this was to a clergyman, and at *breakfast.*

While the second edition of his Poems was passing

through the press, Burns was favoured with many critical suggestions and amendments; to one of which only he attended. Blair, reading over with him, or hearing him recite (which he delighted at all times in doing) his *Holy Fair*, stopped him at the stanza—

> "Now a' the congregation o'er
> Is silent expectation,
> For Russel speels the holy door
> Wi' tidings o' *Salvation*."—

Nay, said the Doctor, read *damnation*. Burns improved the wit of this verse, undoubtedly, by adopting the emendation; but he gave another strange specimen of want of *tact*, when he insisted that Dr Blair, one of the most scrupulous observers of clerical propriety, should permit him to acknowledge the obligation in a note.

But to pass from these trifles, it needs no effort of imagination to conceive what the sensations of an isolated set of scholars (almost all either clergymen or professors) must have been in the presence of this big-boned, black-browed, brawny stranger, with his great flashing eyes, who, having forced his way among them from the plough-tail at a single stride, manifested, in the whole strain of his bearing and conversation, a most thorough conviction, that, in the society of the most eminent men of his nation, he was exactly where he was entitled to be; hardly deigned to flatter them by exhibiting even an occasional symptom of being flattered by their notice; by turns calmly measured himself against the most cultivated understandings of his time in discussion; overpowered the *bon mots* of the most celebrated convivialists by broad floods of merriment, impregnated with all the burning life of genius; astounded bosoms habitually enveloped in the thrice-piled folds of social reserve, by compelling them to tremble —nay to tremble visibly—beneath the fearless touch of natural pathos; and all this without indicating the smallest willingness to be ranked among those professional ministers of excitement, who are content to be paid in money and smiles for doing what the spectators and auditors would be ashamed of doing in their own persons, even if they had the power of doing it; and,—last and probably worst

of all,—who was known to be in the habit of enlivening societies which they would have scorned to approach, still more frequently than their own, with eloquence no less magnificent; with wit in all likelihood still more daring; often enough, as the superiors whom he fronted without alarm might have guessed from the beginning, and had, ere long, no occasion to guess, with wit pointed at themselves.

The lawyers of Edinburgh, in whose wider circles Burns figured at his outset, with at least as much success as among the professional *literati*, were a very different race of men from these; they would neither, I take it, have pardoned rudeness, nor been alarmed by wit. But being, in those days, with scarcely an exception, members of the landed aristocracy of the country, and forming by far the most influential body (as indeed they still do) in the society of Scotland, they were, perhaps, as proud a set of men as ever enjoyed the tranquil pleasures of unquestioned superiority. What their haughtiness, as a body, was, may be guessed, when we know that inferior birth was reckoned a fair and legitimate ground for excluding any man from the bar. In one remarkable instance, about this very time, a man of very extraordinary talents and accomplishments was chiefly opposed in a long and painful struggle for admission, and, in reality, for no reasons but those I have been alluding to, by gentlemen who in the sequel stood at the very head of the whig party in Edinburgh; and the same aristocratical prejudice has, within the memory of the present generation, kept more persons of eminent qualifications in the background, for a season, than any English reader would easily believe. To this body belonged nineteen out of twenty of those "patricians," whose stateliness Burns so long remembered and so bitterly resented. It might, perhaps, have been well for him had stateliness been the worst fault of their manners. Wine-bibbing appears to be in most regions a favourite indulgence with those whose brains and lungs are subjected to the severe exercises of legal study and forensic practice. To this day, more traces of these old habits linger about the inns of court than in any other section of London. In Dublin and Edinburgh, the barristers are

even now eminently convivial bodies of men; but among the Scotch lawyers of the time of Burns, the principle of jollity was indeed in its "high and palmy state." He partook largely in those tavern scenes of audacious hilarity, which then soothed, as a matter of course, the arid labours of the northern *noblesse de la robe* (so they are well called in *Redgauntlet*), and of which we are favoured with a specimen in the "High Jinks" chapter of *Guy Mannering*.

The tavern-life is nowadays nearly extinct everywhere; but it was then in full vigour in Edinburgh, and there can be no doubt that Burns rapidly familiarised himself with it during his residence. He had, after all, tasted but rarely of such excesses while in Ayrshire. So little are we to consider his *Scotch Drink*, and other jovial strains of the early period, as conveying anything like a fair notion of his actual course of life, that "Auld Nanse Tinnock," or "Poosie Nancie," the Mauchline landlady, is known to have expressed, amusingly enough, her surprise at the style in which she found her name celebrated in the Kilmarnock edition, saying, "that Robert Burns might be a very clever lad, but he certainly was *regardless*, as, to the best of her belief, he had never taken three half-mutchkins in her house in all his life."[1] And in addition to Gilbert's testimony to the same purpose, we have on record that of Mr Archibald Bruce (qualified by Heron, "a gentleman of great worth and discernment"), that he had observed Burns closely during that period of his life, and seen him "steadily resist such solicitations and allurements to excessive convivial enjoyment, as hardly any other person could have withstood."

The unfortunate Heron knew Burns well; and himself mingled largely[2] in some of the scenes to which he adverts in the following strong language:—"The enticements of pleasure too often unman our virtuous resolution, even while we wear the air of rejecting them with a stern brow. We resist, and resist, and resist; but, at last, suddenly turn, and passionately embrace the enchantress. The *bucks* of Edinburgh accomplished, in regard to Burns, that

[1] Mr R. Chambers's MS. notes, taken during a tour in Ayrshire.

[2] *See* Burns's allusions to Heron's own habits, in a Poetical Epistle to Blacklock.

in which the *boors* of Ayrshire had failed. After residing some months in Edinburgh, he began to estrange himself, not altogether, but in some measure, from graver friends. Too many of his hours were now spent at the tables of persons who delighted to urge conviviality to drunkenness —in the tavern—and in the brothel." [1]

It would be idle *now* to attempt passing over these things in silence; but it could serve no good purpose to dwell on them.

During this *winter*, Burns continued, as has been mentioned, to lodge with John Richmond; and we have the authority of this early friend of the poet for the statement, that while he did so, "he kept good hours." [2] He removed afterwards to the house of Mr William Nicoll (one of the teachers of the High School of Edinburgh), on the Buccleuch road: and this change is, I suppose, to be considered as a symptom that the keeping of good hours was beginning to be irksome. Nicoll was a man of quick parts and considerable learning—who had risen from a rank as humble as Burns's: from the beginning an enthusiastic admirer, and, ere long, a constant associate of the poet, and a most dangerous associate; for, with a warm heart, the man united a fierce irascible temper, a scorn of many of the decencies of life, a noisy contempt of religion, at least of the religious institutions of his country, and a violent propensity for the bottle. He was one of those who would fain believe themselves to be men of genius; and that genius is a sufficient apology for trampling under foot all the old vulgar rules of prudence and sobriety,—being on both points equally mistaken. Of Nicoll's letters to Burns, and about him, I have seen many that have never been, and probably that never will be, printed—cumbrous and pedantic effusions, exhibiting nothing that one can imagine to have been pleasing to the poet, except what was probably enough to redeem all imperfections—namely, a rapturous admiration of his genius. This man, nevertheless, was, I suspect, very far from being an unfavourable specimen of the society to which Heron thus alludes:—"He (the poet) *suffered* himself to be surrounded by a race of miserable beings, who were proud to tell that they had

[1] Heron, p. 27. [2] Notes by Mr R. Chambers.

been in company with BURNS, and had seen Burns as loose and as foolish as themselves. He was not yet irrecoverably lost to temperance and moderation; but he was already almost too much captivated with their wanton revels, to be ever more won back to a faithful attachment to *their* more sober charms." Heron adds—"He now also began to contract something of new arrogance in conversation. Accustomed to be, among his favourite associates, what is vulgarly, but expressively called, the cock of the company, he could scarcely refrain from indulging in similar freedom and dictatorial decision of talk, even in the presence of persons who could less patiently endure his presumption;"[1] an account *ex facie* probable, and which sufficiently tallies with some hints in Mr Dugald Stewart's description of the poet's manners, as he first observed him at Catrine, and with one or two anecdotes already cited from Walker and Cromek.

Of these failings, and indeed of all Burns's failings, it may be safely asserted, that there was more in his history to account and apologise for them, than can be alleged in regard to almost any other great man's imperfections. We have seen, how, even in his earliest days, the strong thirst of distinction glowed within him—how in his first and rudest rhymes he sung,

"—— to be great is charming;"

and we have also seen, that the display of talent in conversation was the first means of distinction that occurred to him. It was by that talent that he first attracted notice among his fellow peasants, and after he mingled with the first Scotsmen of his time, this talent was still that which appeared the most astonishing of all he possessed. What wonder that he should delight in exerting it where he could exert it the most freely—where there was no check upon a tongue that had been accustomed to revel in the license of village-mastery? where every sally, however bold, was sure to be received with triumphant applause—where there were no claims to rival his—no proud brows to convey rebuke, above all, perhaps, no grave eyes to convey regret? "Nonsense," says Cumberland, "talked by men of wit

[1] Heron, p. 28.

and understanding in the hours of relaxation, is of the very finest essence of conviviality; but it implies a trust in the company not always to be risked." It was little in Burns's character to submit to nice and scrupulous rules, when he knew that, by crossing the street, he could find society who would applaud him the more, the more heroically all such rules were disregarded; and he who had passed from the company of the jolly *bachelors* of Tarbolton and Mauchline, to that of the eminent Scotsmen whose names were honoured all over the civilised world, without discovering any difference that appeared worthy of much consideration, was well prepared to say, with the prince of all free-speakers and free-livers, "I will take mine ease in mine inn!"

But these, assuredly, were not the only feelings that influenced Burns: In his own letters, written during his stay in Edinburgh, we have the best evidence to the contrary. He shrewdly suspected, from the very beginning, that the personal notice of the great and the illustrious was not to be as lasting as it was eager: he foresaw, that sooner or later he was destined to revert to societies less elevated above the pretensions of his birth; and, though his jealous pride might induce him to record his suspicions in language rather too strong than too weak, it is quite impossible to read what he wrote without believing that a sincere distrust lay rankling at the roots of his heart, all the while that he appeared to be surrounded with an atmosphere of joy and hope.

On the 15th of January 1787, we find him thus addressing his kind patroness, Mrs Dunlop:—

"You are afraid I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet. Alas! madam, I know myself and the world too well. I do not mean any airs of affected modesty; I am willing to believe that my abilities deserved some notice; but in a most enlightened, informed age and nation, when poetry is and has been the study of men of the first natural genius, aided with all the powers of polite learning, polite books, and polite company—to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity, and crude unpolished ideas, on my head,—I

assure you, madam, I do not dissemble, when I tell you I tremble for the consequences. The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised a partial tide of public notice, which has borne me to a height where I am absolutely, feelingly certain, my abilities are inadequate to support me; and too surely do I see that time, when the same tide will leave me, and recede perhaps as far below the mark of truth. . . . I mention this once for all, to disburden my mind, and I do not wish to hear or say any more about it. But—'When proud fortune's ebbing tide recedes,' you will bear me witness, that when my bubble of fame was at the highest, I stood unintoxicated with the inebriating cup in my hand, *looking forward with rueful resolve.*"

And about the same time, to Dr Moore :—"The hope to be admired for ages is, in by far the greater part of those even who are authors of repute, an unsubstantial dream. For my part, my first ambition was, and still my strongest wish is, to please my compeers, the rustic inmates of the hamlet, while ever-changing language and manners shall allow me to be relished and understood. I am very willing to admit that I have some poetical abilities; and as few, if any writers, either moral or poetical, are intimately acquainted with the classes of mankind among whom I have chiefly mingled, I may have seen men and manners in a different phasis from what is common, which may assist originality of thought. . . . I scorn the affectation of seeming modesty to cover self-conceit. That I have some merit, I do not deny; but I see, with frequent wringings of heart, that the novelty of my character, and the honest national prejudice of my countrymen, have borne me to a height altogether untenable to my abilities."—And lastly, April the 23rd, 1787, we have the following passage in a letter also to Dr Moore :—"I leave Edinburgh in the course of ten days or a fortnight. I shall return to my rural shades, *in all likelihood never more to quit them.* I have formed many intimacies and friendships here, *but I am afraid they are all of too tender a construction to bear carriage a hundred and fifty miles.*"

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One word more on the subject which introduced these quotations:—Mr Dugald Stewart, no doubt, hints at what was a common enough complaint among the elegant *literati* of Edinburgh, when he alludes, in his letter to Currie, to the "not very select society" in which Burns indulged himself. But two points still remain somewhat doubtful; namely, whether, show and marvel of the season as he was, the "Ayrshire ploughman" really had it in his power to live *always* in society which Mr Stewart would have considered as "very select"; and secondly, whether, in so doing, he could have failed to chill the affection of those humble Ayrshire friends, who, having shared with him all that they possessed on his first arrival in the metropolis, faithfully and fondly adhered to him, after the springtide of fashionable favour did, as he foresaw it would do, "recede;" and, moreover, perhaps to provoke, among the higher circles themselves, criticisms more distasteful to his proud stomach, than any probable consequences of the course of conduct which he actually pursued.

The second edition of Burns's poems was published early in March, by Creech; there were no less than 1500 subscribers, many of whom paid more than the shop-price of the volume. Although, therefore, the final settlement with the bookseller did not take place till nearly a year after, Burns now found himself in possession of a considerable sum of ready money; and the first impulse of his mind was to visit some of the classic scenes of Scottish history and romance.[1] He had as yet seen but a small part of his own country, and this by no means among the most interesting of her districts, until, indeed, his own poetry made it equal, on that score, to any other.

[1] "The appellation of a Scottish bard is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it, is my most exalted ambition. Scottish scenes, and Scottish story, are the themes I could wish to sing. I have no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagued with the routine of business, for which, Heaven knows, I am unfit enough, to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles, to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers, and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, once the honoured abodes of her heroes. But these are Utopian views."—*Letter to Mrs Dunlop, Edinburgh, 22nd March*, 1787.

The magnificent scenery of the capital itself had filled him with extraordinary delight. In the spring mornings, he walked very often to the top of Arthur's Seat, and, lying prostrate on the turf, surveyed the rising of the sun out of the sea, in silent admiration; his chosen companion on such occasions being that ardent lover of nature, and learned artist, Mr Alexander Nasmyth.[1] The Braid hills, to the south of Edinburgh, were also among his favourite morning walks; and it was in some of these that Mr Dugald Stewart tells us "he charmed him still more by his private conversation than he had ever done in company." "He was," adds the professor, "passionately fond of the beauties of nature, and I recollect once he told me, when I was admiring a distant prospect in one of our morning walks, that the sight of so many smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind which none could understand who had not witnessed, like himself, the happiness and the worth which they contained."

Burns was far too busy with society and observation to find time for poetical composition, during this first residence in Edinburgh. Creech's edition included some pieces of great merit, which had not been previously printed; but, with the exception of the *Address to Edinburgh*, which is chiefly remarkable for the grand stanzas on the Castle and Holyrood, with which it concludes, all of these appear to have been written before he left Ayrshire. Several of them, indeed, were very early productions: The most important additions were, *Death and Doctor Hornbook*, *The Brigs of Ayr*, *The Ordination*, and

[1] It was to this venerable artist that Burns sat for the portrait engraved in Creech's edition, and since repeated so often, that it must be familiar to all readers. Mr Nasmyth also prepared, for Constable's Miscellany, a sketch of the Poet at full-length, as he appeared in Edinburgh in the first hey-day of his reputation; dressed in tight jockey boots, and very tight buckskin breeches, according to the fashion of the day, and (Jacobite as he was) in what was considered as the Fox-livery, viz., a blue coat and buff waistcoat, with broad blue stripes. The surviving friends of Burns who have seen this vignette, are unanimous in pronouncing it to furnish a very lively representation of the bard as he first attracted public notice on the streets of Edinburgh. The scenery of the background is very nearly that of Burns's native spot—the kirk of Alloway and the bridge of Doon.

the *Address to the unco Guid.* In this addition also, *When Guildford guid our pilot stood*, made its first appearance, on reading which, Dr Blair uttered his pithy criticism, "Burns's politics always smell of the smithy."

It ought not to be omitted, that our poet bestowed some of the firstfruits of this edition in the erection of a decent tombstone over the hitherto neglected remains of his unfortunate predecessor, Robert Ferguson, in the Canongate churchyard.

The evening before he quitted Edinburgh, the poet addressed a letter to Dr Blair, in which, taking a most respectful farewell of him, and expressing, in lively terms, his sense of gratitude for the kindness he had shown him, he thus recurs to his own views of his own past and future condition: "I have often felt the embarrassment of my singular situation. However the meteor-like novelty of my appearance in the world might attract notice, I knew very well, that my utmost merit was far unequal to the task of preserving that character when once the novelty was over. I have made up my mind, that abuse, or almost even neglect, will not surprise me in my quarters."—To this touching letter the amiable Blair replied in a truly paternal strain of consolation and advice.—"Your situation," says he, "was indeed very singular: you have had to stand a severe trial. I am happy that you have stood it so well. . . . You are now, I presume, to retire to a more private walk of life. . . . You have laid the foundation for just public esteem. In the midst of those employments, which your situation will render proper, you will not, I hope, neglect to promote that esteem, by cultivating your genius, and attending to such productions of it as may raise your character still higher. At the same time, be not in too great a haste to come forward. Take time and leisure to improve and mature your talents; for, on any second production you give the world, your fate, as a poet, will very much depend. There is, no doubt, a gloss of novelty which time wears off. As you very properly hint yourself, you are not to be surprised if, in your rural retreat, you do not find yourself surrounded with that glare of notice and applause which here shone upon you. No man can be a good poet without being somewhat of a

philosopher. He must lay his account, that any one who exposes himself to public observation, will occasionally meet with the attacks of illiberal censure, which it is always best to overlook and despise. He will be inclined sometimes to court retreat, and to disappear from public view. He will not affect to shine always, that he may at proper seasons come forth with more advantage and energy. He will not think himself neglected if he be not always praised." Such were Blair's admonitions.

"And part was heard, and part was lost in air."

Burns had one object of worldly business in his journey; namely, to examine the estate of Dalswinton, near Dumfries, the proprietor of which had, on learning that the poet designed to return to his original calling, expressed a strong wish to have him for his tenant.

CHAPTER VI

"Ramsay and famous Ferguson,
Gied Forth and Tay a lift aboon;
Yarrow and Tweed to monie a tune
Thro' Scotland rings,
While Irvine, Lugar, Ayr, and Doon,
Naebody sings."

On the 6th of May, Burns left Edinburgh, in company with Mr Robert Ainslie,[1] son to Mr Ainslie of Berrywell in Berwickshire, with the design of perambulating the picturesque scenery of the southern border, and in particular of visiting the localities celebrated by the old minstrels, of whose works he was a passionate admirer; and of whom, by the way, one of the last appears to have been all but a namesake of his own.[2]

This was long before the time when those fields of Scottish romance were to be made accessible to the curiosity of citizens by stage-coaches; and Burns and his friend performed their tour on horseback; the former being mounted on a favourite mare, whom he had named Jenny Geddes, in honour of the zealous virago who threw her stool at the Dean of Edinburgh's head on the 23rd of

[1] Now Clerk to the Signet. Among other changes "which fleeting time procureth," this amiable gentleman, whose youthful gaiety made him a chosen associate of Burns, is now chiefly known as the author of some Manuals of Devotion.

[2] Nicoll Burn, supposed to have lived towards the close of the 16th century, and to have been among the last of the itinerant minstrels. He is the author of *Leader Haughs and Yarrow*, a pathetic ballad, in the last verse of which his own name and designation are introduced.

"Sing Erlington and Cowden knowes, where Homes had ance commanding;
And Drygrange, wi' the milk white ewes, 'twixt Tweed and Leader standing.
The bird that flees thro' Reedpath trees, and Gledswood banks, ilk morrow,
May chant and sing sweet Leader Haughs, and bonny howms of Yarrow.
But minstrel Burn cannot assuage his grief while life endureth,
To see the changes of this age, that fleeting time procureth.
For mony a place stands in hard case, where blythe folk kend nae sorrow:
With Homes that dwelt on Leader side, and Scotts that dwelt on Yarrow."

July 1637, when the attempt was made to introduce a Scottish *Liturgy* into the service of St Giles's;—the same trusty animal, whose merits have been recorded by Burns, in a letter, which must have been puzzling to most modern Scotsmen, before the days of Dr Jamieson.[1]

Burns passed from Edinburgh to Berrywell, the residence of Mr Ainslie's family, and visited successively Dunse, Coldstream, Kelso, Fleurs, and the ruins of Roxburgh Castle, near which a holly bush still marks the spot on which James II. of Scotland was killed by the bursting of a cannon. Jedburgh—where he admired the "charming romantic situation of the town, with gardens and orchards intermingled among the houses of a once magnificent cathedral (abbey);" and was struck (as in the other towns of the same district), with the appearance of "old rude grandeur," and the idleness of decay; Melrose, "that far-famed glorious ruin," Selkirk, Ettrick, and the braes of Yarrow. Having spent three weeks in this district, of which it has been justly said, "that every field has its battle, and every rivulet its song," Burns passed the Border, and visited Alnwick, Warkworth, Morpeth, Newcastle, Hexham, Wardrue, and Carlisle. He then turned northwards, and rode by Annan and Dumfries to Dalswinton, where he examined Mr Miller's property, and was so much pleased with the soil, and the terms on which the landlord was willing to grant him a lease, that he resolved to return again in the course of the summer.

Dr Currie has published some extracts from the journal which Burns kept during this excursion; but they are mostly very trivial. He was struck with the superiority of soil, climate, and cultivation, in Berwick and Roxburghshires, as compared with his native county; and not a little surprised, when he dined at a Farmers' Club at Kelso, with the apparent wealth of that order of men.—"All

[1] "My auld ga'd gleyde o' a meere has huchyalled up hill and down brae, as teuch and birnie as a vera devil, wi' me. It's true she's as puir's a sangmaker, and as hard's a kirk, and lipper-laipers when she takes the gate, like a lady's gentlewoman in a minuwae, or a hen on a het girdle; but she's a yauld poutherin girran for a' that. When ance her ringbanes and pavies, her cruiks and cramps, are fairly soupled, she beets to, beets to, and aye the hindmost hour the lightest," etc. etc.—*Letter to Mr Nicoll, Reliques*, p. 28.

gentlemen, talking of high matters—each of them keeps a hunter from £30 to £50 value, and attends the Fox-hunting Club in the county." The farms in the west of Scotland are, to this day, very small for the most part, and the farmers little distinguished from their labourers in their modes of life: the contrast was doubtless stronger, forty years ago, between them and their brethren of the Lothians and the Merse.

The Magistrates of Jedburgh presented Burns with the freedom of their town: he was unprepared for the compliment, and, jealous of obligations, stept out of the room, and made an effort (of course an ineffectual one) to pay beforehand out of his own purse the landlord's bill for the "riddle of claret," which is usually presented on such occasions in a Scotch burgh.[1]

The poet visited, in the course of his tour, Sir James Hall of Dunglas, author of the well-known *Essay on Gothic Architecture*, etc.; Sir Alexander and Lady Harriet Don (sister to his patron, Lord Glencairn), at Newton-Don; Mr Brydone, the author of *Travels in Sicily;* the amiable and learned Dr Somerville of Jedburgh, the historian of Queen Anne, etc.: and, as usual, recorded in his journal his impressions as to their manners and characters. His reception was everywhere most flattering.

He wrote no verses, as far as is known, during this tour, except a humorous Epistle to his bookseller Creech, dated Selkirk, 13th May. In this he makes complimentary allusions to some of the men of letters who were used to meet at breakfast in Creech's apartments in those days—whence the name of *Creech's levee;* and touches, too briefly, on some of the scenery he had visited.

> "Up wimpling stately Tweed I've sped,
> And Eden scenes on crystal Jed,
> And Ettrick banks now roaring red,
> While tempests blaw"——

Burns returned to Mauchline on the 8th of July. It is pleasing to imagine the delight with which he must have been received by his family after the absence of six months, in which his fortunes and prospects had undergone so wonderful a change. He left them comparatively

[1] Mr R. Chambers's notes.

unknown, his tenderest feelings torn and wounded by the behaviour of the Armours, and so miserably poor, that he had been for some weeks obliged to skulk from the Sheriff's officers, to avoid the payment of a paltry debt. He returned, his poetical fame established, the whole country ringing with his praises, from a capital in which he was known to have formed the wonder and delight of the polite and the learned; if not rich, yet with more money already than any of his kindred had ever hoped to see him possess, and with prospects of future patronage and permanent elevation in the scale of society which might have dazzled steadier eyes than those of maternal and fraternal affection. The prophet had at last honour in his own country: but the haughty spirit that had preserved its balance in Edinburgh, was not likely to lose it at Mauchline; and we have him writing from *the auld clay biggin* on the 18th of June, in terms as strongly expressive as any that ever came from his pen, of that jealous pride which formed the groundwork of his character; that dark suspiciousness of fortune, which the subsequent course of his history too well justified; that nervous intolerance of condescension, and consummate scorn of meanness, which attended him through life, and made the study of his species, for which nature had given him such extraordinary qualifications, the source of more pain than was ever counterbalanced by the exquisite capacity for enjoyment with which he was also endowed. There are few of his letters in which more of the dark places of his spirit come to light:—"I never, my friend, thought mankind capable of anything very generous; but the stateliness of the patricians of Edinburgh, and the servility of my plebeian brethren (who, perhaps, formerly eyed me askance), since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species. I have bought a pocket-Milton, which I carry perpetually about me, in order to study the sentiments, the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid unyielding independence, the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great personage—Satan. . . . The many ties of acquaintance and friendship I have, or think I have, in life—I have felt along the lines, and, d——n them, they are almost all of them of

such frail texture, that I am sure they would not stand the breath of the least adverse breeze of fortune."

Among those who, having formerly 'eyed him askance," now appeared sufficiently ready to court his society, were the family of Jean Armour. Burns's affection for this beautiful young woman had outlived his resentment of her compliance with her father's commands in the preceding summer; and from the time of this reconciliation, it is probable he always looked forward to a permanent union with the mother of his children.

Burns at least fancied himself to be busy with serious plans for his future establishment; and was very naturally disposed to avail himself, as far as he could, of the opportunities of travel and observation, which an interval of leisure, destined probably to be a short one, might present. Moreover, in spite of his gloomy language, a specimen of which has just been quoted, we are not to doubt that he derived much pleasure from witnessing the extensive popularity of his writings, and from the flattering homage he was sure to receive in his own person in the various districts of his native country; nor can any one wonder, that after the state of high excitement in which he had spent the winter and spring, he, fond as he was of his family, and eager to make them partakers in all his good fortune, should have, just at this time, found himself incapable of sitting down contentedly for any considerable period together, in so humble and quiet a circle as that of Mossgiel.

His appetite for wandering appears to have been only sharpened by his Border excursion. After remaining a few days at home, he returned to Edinburgh, and thence proceeded on another short tour, by way of Stirling, to Inverary, and so back again, by Dumbarton, and Glasgow, to Mauchline. Of this second excursion, no journal has been discovered; nor do the extracts from his correspondence, printed by Dr Currie, appear to be worthy of much notice. In one, he briefly describes the West Highlands as a country "where savage streams tumble over savage mountains, thinly overspread with savage flocks, which starvingly support as savage inhabitants:" and in another, he gives an account of Jenny Geddes running a race *after*

dinner with a Highlander's pony—of his dancing and drinking till sunrise at a gentleman's house on Loch Lomond; and of other similar matters.—"I have as yet," says he, "fixed on nothing with respect to the serious business of life. I am, just as usual, a rhyming, mason-making, raking, aimless, idle fellow. However, I shall somewhere have a farm soon."

In the course of this tour, Burns visited the mother and sisters of his friend, Gavin Hamilton, then residing at Harvieston, in Clackmannanshire, in the immediate neighbourhood of the magnificent scenery of Castle Campbell,[1] and the vale of Devon. He was especially delighted with one of the young ladies; and, according to his usual custom, celebrated her in a song, in which, in opposition to his usual custom, there is nothing but the respectfulness of admiration.

"How pleasant the banks of the clear winding Devon," etc.

At Harviestonbank, also, the poet first became acquainted with Miss Chalmers, afterwards Mrs Hay, to whom one of the most interesting series of his letters is addressed. Indeed, with the exception of his letters to Mrs Dunlop, there is, perhaps, no part of his correspondence which may be quoted so uniformly to his honour.

It was on this expedition, that having been visited with a high flow of Jacobite indignation while viewing the neglected palace at Stirling, he was imprudent enough to write some verses bitterly vituperative of the reigning family on the window of his inn. These verses were copied and talked of; and although the next time Burns passed through Stirling, he himself broke the pane of glass containing them, they were remembered years afterwards to his disadvantage, and even danger. The last couplet, alluding, in the coarsest style, to the melancholy

[1] Castle Campbell, called otherwise the *Castle of Gloom*, is situated very grandly in a gorge of the Ochills, commanding an extensive view of the plain of Stirling. This ancient possession of the Argyll family was, in some sort, a town-residence for those chieftains in the days when the court was usually held at Stirling, Linlithgow, or Falkland. The castle was burnt by Montrose, and has never been repaired. The *cauldron linn* and *rumbling brigg* of the Devon lie near Castle Campbell, on the verge of the plain.

state of the good king's health at the time, was indeed an outrage of which no political prejudice could have made a gentleman approve: but he, in all probability, composed his verses after dinner; and surely what Burns would fain have undone, others should have been not unwilling to forget. In this case, too, the poetry "smells of the smith's-shop," as well as the sentiment.

Mr Dugald Stewart has pronounced Burns's epigrams to be, of all his writings, the least worthy of his talents. Those which he composed in the course of this tour, on being refused admittance to see the iron works at Carron, and on finding himself ill served at the inn at Inverary, in consequence of his Grace the Duke of Argyll having a large party at the Castle, form no exceptions to the rule. He had never, we may suppose, met with the famous recipe of the Jelly-bag Club; and was addicted to beginning with the point.

The young ladies of Harvieston were, according to Dr Currie, surprised with the calm manner in which Burns contemplated their fine scenery on Devon water; and the Doctor enters into a little dissertation on the subject, showing that a man of Burns's lively imagination might probably have formed anticipations which the realities of the prospect might rather disappoint. This is possible enough; but I suppose few will take it for granted that Burns surveyed any scenes either of beauty or of grandeur without emotion, merely because he did not choose to be ecstatic for the benefit of a company of young ladies. He was indeed very impatient of interruption on such occasions; I have heard that riding one dark night near Carron, his companion teased him with noisy exclamations of delight and wonder, whenever an opening in the wood permitted them to see the magnificent glare of the furnaces; "Look, Burns! Good Heaven! look! look! what a glorious sight!" —"Sir," said Burns, clapping spurs to Jenny Geddes, "I would not *look! look!* at your bidding, if it were the mouth of hell!"

Burns spent the month of July at Mossgiel; and Mr Dugald Stewart, in a letter to Currie, gives some recollections of him as he then appeared.

"Notwithstanding the various reports I heard during

the preceding winter, of Burns's predilection for convivial, and not very select society, I should have concluded in favour of his habits of sobriety, from all of him that ever fell under my own observation. He told me indeed himself, that the weakness of his stomach was such as to deprive him entirely of any merit in his temperance. I was, however, somewhat alarmed about the effect of his now comparatively sedentary and luxurious life, when he confessed to me, the first night he spent in my house after his winter's campaign in town, that he had been much disturbed when in bed, by a palpitation at his heart, which, he said, was a complaint to which he had of late become subject.

"In the course of the same season I was led by curiosity to attend for an hour or two a Masonic Lodge in Mauchline, where Burns presided. He had occasion to make some short unpremeditated compliments to different individuals from whom he had no reason to expect a visit, and everything he said was happily conceived, and forcibly as well as fluently expressed. His manner of speaking in public had evidently the marks of some practice in extempore elocution."

In August, Burns revisited Stirlingshire, in company with Dr Adair, of Harrowgate, and remained ten days at Harvieston. He was received with particular kindness at Ochtertyre, on the Teith, by Mr Ramsay (a friend of Blacklock) whose beautiful retreat he enthusiastically admired. His host was among the last of that old Scottish line of Latinists, which began with Buchanan, and, I fear, may be said to have ended with Gregory. Mr Ramsay, among other eccentricities, had sprinkled the walls of his house with Latin inscriptions, some of them highly elegant; and these particularly interested Burns, who asked and obtained copies and translations of them. This amiable man (whose manners and residence were not, I take it, out of the novelist's recollection, when he painted Monkbarns), was deeply read in Scottish antiquities, and the author of some learned essays on the elder poetry of his country. His conversation must have delighted any man of talents; and Burns and he were mutually charmed with each other. Ramsay advised him strongly to turn his

attention to the romantic drama, and proposed the *Gentle Shepherd* as a model: he also urged him to write *Scottish Georgics*, observing that Thomson had by no means exhausted that field. He appears to have relished both hints. "But," says Mr R., "to have executed either plan, steadiness and abstraction from company were wanting."

"I have been in the company of many men of genius (writes Mr Ramsay), some of them poets; but I never witnessed such flashes of intellectual brightness as from him, the impulse of the moment, sparks of celestial fire. I never was more delighted, therefore, than with his company two days *tête-à-tête*. In a mixed company I should have made little of him; for, to use a gamester's phrase, he did not always know when to play off and when to play on.

"When I asked him whether the Edinburgh *literati* had mended his poems by their criticisms—'Sir,' said he, 'those gentlemen remind me of some spinsters in my country, who spin their thread so fine that it is neither fit for weft nor woof.'"

At Clackmannan Tower, the Poet's jacobitism procured him a hearty welcome from the ancient lady of the place, who gloried in considering herself as a lineal descendant of Robert Bruce. She bestowed on Burns what knighthood the touch of the hero's sword could confer; and delighted him by giving as her toast after dinner, *Hooki uncos*[1]—away strangers! At Dunfermline the poet betrayed deep emotion, Dr Adair tells us, on seeing the grave of the Bruce; but, passing to another mood on entering the adjoining church, he mounted the pulpit, and addressed his companions, who had, at his desire, ascended the *cuttystool*, in a parody of the rebuke which he had himself undergone some time before at Mauchline.

From Dunfermline the poet crossed the Frith of Forth to Edinburgh; and forthwith set out with his friend Nicoll on a more extensive tour than he had as yet undertaken, or was ever again to undertake. Some fragments of his journal have recently been discovered, and are now in my hands; so that I may hope to add some interesting particulars to the account of Dr Currie. The travellers hired

[1] A shepherd's cry when strange sheep mingle in the flock.

a post-chaise for their expedition—the High-school master being, probably, no very skilful equestrian.

"August 25th, 1787.—This day," says Burns, "I leave Edinburgh for a tour, in company with my good friend, Mr Nicoll, whose originality of humour promises me much entertainment. *Linlithgow.*—A fertile improved country is West Lothian. The more elegance and luxury among the farmers, I always observe, in equal proportion, the rudeness and stupidity of the peasantry. This remark I have made all over the Lothians, Merse, Roxburgh, etc.; and for this, among other reasons, I think that a man of romantic taste, 'a man of feeling,' will be better pleased with the poverty, but intelligent minds, of the peasantry of Ayrshire (peasantry they are all, below the Justice of Peace), than the opulence of a club of Merse farmers, when he, at the same time, considers the Vandalism of their plough-folks, etc. I carry this idea so far, that an uninclosed, unimproved country is to me actually more agreeable as a prospect, than a country cultivated like a garden."

It was hardly to be expected that Robert Burns should have estimated the wealth of nations entirely on the principles of a political economist.

Of Linlithgow he says, "the town carries the appearance of rude, decayed, idle grandeur—charmingly rural retired situation—the old Royal Palace a tolerably fine but melancholy ruin, sweetly situated by the brink of a loch. Shown the room where the beautiful injured Mary Queen of Scots was born. A pretty good old Gothic church—the infamous stool of repentance, in the old Romish way, on a lofty situation. What a poor pimping business is a Presbyterian place of worship; dirty, narrow, and squalid, stuck in a corner of old Popish grandeur, such as Linlithgow, and much more Melrose! Ceremony and show, if judiciously thrown in, are absolutely necessary for the bulk of mankind, both in religious and civil matters——"

At Bannockburn he writes as follows: "Here no Scot can pass uninterested. I fancy to myself that I see my gallant countrymen coming over the hill, and down upon the plunderers of their country, the murderers of their fathers, noble revenge and just hate glowing in every vein,

striding more and more eagerly as they approach the oppressive, insulting, bloodthirsty foe. I see them meet in glorious triumphant congratulation on the victorious field, exulting in their heroic royal leader, and rescued liberty and independence."[1]

Here we have the germ of Burns's famous ode on the battle of Bannockburn.

At Taymouth, the Journal merely has—"*described in rhyme.*" This alludes to the "verses written with a pencil over the mantelpiece of the parlour in the inn at Kenmore;" some of which are among his best purely English heroics:—

"Poetic ardours in my bosom swell,
Lone wandering by the hermit's mossy cell;
The sweeping theatre of hanging woods;
The incessant roar of headlong-tumbling floods . . .
Here Poesy might wake her heaven-taught lyre,
And look through nature with creative fire . . .
Here, to the wrongs of fate half reconciled,
Misfortune's lighten'd steps might wander wild;
And Disappointment, in these lonely bounds,
Find balm to soothe her bitter rankling wounds;
Here heart-struck Grief might heavenward stretch her scan,
And injured Worth forget and pardon man."

Of Glenlyon we have this memorandum:—"Druid's temple, three circles of stones, the outermost sunk, the second has thirteen stones remaining, the innermost eight; two large detached ones like a gate to the south-east—*say prayers in it.*"

His notes on Dunkeld and Blair of Athole are as follows:—"*Dunkeld*—Breakfast with Dr Stuart — Neil Gow plays; a short, stout-built, Highland figure, with his greyish hair shed on his honest social brow—an interesting face, marking strong sense, kind openheartedness, mixed

[1] In the last words of Burns's note above quoted, he perhaps glances at a beautiful trait of old Barbour, where he describes Bruce's soldiers as crowding round him at the conclusion of one of his hard-fought days, with as much curiosity as if they had never seen his person before.

"Sic wordis spak they of their king;
And for his hie undertaking
Ferleyit and yernit him for to see,
That with him ay was wont to be——

with unmistrusting simplicity—visit his house—Margaret Gow.—*Friday*—ride up Tummel river to Blair. Fascally, a beautiful romantic nest—wild grandeur of the pass of Gillikrankie—visit the gallant Lord Dundee's stone. *Blair*—sup with the Duchess—easy and happy from the manners of that family—confirmed in my good opinion of my friend Walker.—*Saturday*—Visit the scenes round Blair—fine, but spoilt with bad taste."

Mr Walker, who, as we have seen, formed Burns's acquaintance in Edinburgh through Blacklock, was at this period tutor in the family of Athole, and from him the following particulars of Burns's reception at the seat of his noble patron are derived. "I had often, like others, experienced the pleasures which arise from the sublime or elegant landscape, but I never saw those feelings so intense as in Burns. When we reached a rustic hut on the river Tilt, where it is overhung by a woody precipice, from which there is a noble waterfall, he threw himself on the heathy seat, and gave himself up to a tender, abstracted, and voluptuous enthusiasm of imagination. It was with much difficulty I prevailed on him to quit this spot, and to be introduced in proper time to supper.

"He seemed at once to perceive and to appreciate what was due to the company and to himself, and never to forget a proper respect for the separate species of dignity belonging to each. He did not arrogate conversation, but, when led into it, he spoke with ease, propriety, and manliness. He tried to exert his abilities, because he knew it was ability alone gave him a title to be there. The Duke's fine young family attracted much of his admiration; he drank their healths as *honest men and bonny lasses*, an idea which was much applauded by the company, and with which he has very felicitously closed his poem.

"Next day I took a ride with him through some of the most remarkable parts of that neighbourhood, and was highly gratified by his conversation. As a specimen of his happiness of conception, and strength of expression, I will mention a remark which he made on his fellow-traveller, who was walking at the time a few paces before us. He was a man of a robust but clumsy person; and,

while Burns was expressing to me the value he entertained for him, on account of his vigorous talents, although they were clouded at times by coarseness of manners—'in short,' he added, 'his mind is like his body, he has a confounded strong in-knee'd sort of a soul.'

"Much attention was paid to Burns both before and after the Duke's return, of which he was perfectly sensible, without being vain; and at his departure I recommended to him, as the most appropriate return he could make, to write some descriptive verses on any of the scenes with which he had been so much delighted. After leaving Blair, he, by the Duke's advice, visited the *Falls of Bruar*, and in a few days I received a letter from Inverness, with the verses enclosed."[1]

At Blair, Burns first met with Mr Graham of Fintray, a gentleman to whose kindness he was afterwards indebted on more than one important occasion; and Mr Walker expresses great regret that he did not remain a day or two more, in which case he must have been introduced to Mr Dundas, afterwards Viscount Melville, who was then Treasurer of the Navy, and had the chief management of the affairs of Scotland. This eminent statesman was, though little addicted to literature, a warm lover of his own country, and, in general, of whatever redounded to her honour; he was, moreover, very especially qualified to appreciate Burns as a companion; and, had such an introduction taken place, he might not improbably have been induced to bestow that consideration on the claims of the poet, which, in the absence of any personal acquaintance, Burns's works ought to have received at his hands.

From Blair, Burns passed "many miles through a wild country, among cliffs grey with eternal snows, and gloomy savage glens, till he crossed Spey; and went down the

[1] The banks of the Bruar, whose naked condition called forth "the humble petition," to which Mr Walker thus refers, have since those days been well cared for, and the river in its present state, could have no pretext for the prayer—

> "——Let lofty firs, and ashes cool, my lowly banks o'erspread,
> And view, deep bending in the pool, their shadows' watery bed;
> Let fragrant birks, in woodbines drest, my craggy cliffs adorn,
> And for the little songster's nest, the close embowering thorn."

stream through Strathspey (so famous in Scottish music), Badenoch, etc., to Grant Castle, where he spent half a day with Sir James Grant; crossed the country to Fort George, but called by the way at Cawdor, the ancient seat of Macbeth, where he saw the identical bed in which, *tradition says*, King Duncan was murdered; lastly, from Fort George to Inverness."[1] From Inverness, he went along the Murray Frith to Fochabers, taking Culloden-Muir and Brodie-house in his way.[2]—"Cross Spey to Fochabers—fine palace, worthy of the noble, the polite, the generous proprietor—the Duke makes me happier than ever great man did; noble, princely, yet mild, condescending, and affable—gay and kind.—The Duchess charming, witty, kind, and sensible—God bless them."——

Burns, who had been much noticed by this noble family when in Edinburgh, happened to present himself at Gordon Castle, just at the dinner hour, and being invited to take a place at the table, did so, without for the moment adverting to the circumstance that his travelling companion had been left alone at the inn, in the adjacent village. On remembering this soon after dinner, he begged to be allowed to rejoin his friend; and the Duke of Gordon, who now for the first time learned that he was not journeying alone, immediately proposed to send an invitation to Mr Nicoll, to come to the castle. His Grace's messenger found the haughty schoolmaster strid-

[1] Letter to Gilbert Burns, Edinburgh, 17th Dec. 1787.

[2] (Extract from *Journal.*)—*Thursday*, Came over Culloden-Muir—reflections on the field of battle—breakfast at Kilraick *—old Mrs Rose—sterling sense, warm heart, strong passion, honest pride—all to an uncommon degree—a true chieftain's wife, daughter of Clephane—Mrs Rose, jun., a little milder than the mother, perhaps owing to her being younger—two young ladies—Miss Rose sung two Gaelic songs—beautiful and lovely—Miss Sophy Brodie, not very beautiful, but most agreeable and amiable—both of them the gentlest, mildest, sweetest creatures on earth, and happiness be with them! Brodie-house to lie—Mr B. truly polite, but not quite the Highland cordiality.—*Friday*, Cross the Findhorn to Forres—famous stone at Forres—Mr Brodie tells me the muir where Shakspeare lays Macbeth's witch-meeting, is still haunted—that the country folks won't pass by night.—*Elgin*—venerable ruins of the abbey, a grander effect at first glance than Melrose, but nothing near so beautiful.

* Commonly spelt Kilravock, the seat of a very ancient family.

ing up and down before the inn door, in a state of high wrath and indignation, at what he considered Burns's neglect, and no apologies could soften his mood. He had already ordered horses, and the poet finding that he must choose between the ducal circle and his irritable associate, at once left Gordon Castle, and repaired to the inn; whence Nicoll and he, in silence and mutual displeasure, pursued their journey along the coast of the Murray Frith. This incident may serve to suggest some of the annoyances to which persons moving, like our poet, on the debateable land between two different ranks of society, must ever be subjected. To play *the lion* under such circumstances, must be difficult at the best; but a delicate business, indeed, when the jackalls are presumptuous. This pedant could not stomach the superior success of his friend—and yet, alas for poor human nature! he certainly was one of the most enthusiastic of his admirers, and one of the most affectionate of all his intimates. The abridgement of Burns's visit at Gordon Castle, "was not only," says Mr Walker, "a mortifying disappointment, but in all probability a serious misfortune, as a longer stay among persons of such influence, might have begot a permanent intimacy, and on their parts, an active concern for his future advancement."[1] But this touches on a subject which we cannot at present pause to consider.

A few days after leaving Fochabers, Burns transmitted to Gordon Castle his acknowledgment of the hospitality he had received from the noble family, in the stanzas:—

> "Streams that glide on orient plains,
> Never bound by winter's chains," etc.

The Duchess, on hearing them read, said she supposed they were Dr Beattie's, and on learning whose they really were, expressed her wish that Burns had celebrated Gordon Castle in his own dialect. The verses are among the poorest of his productions.

Pursuing his journey along the coast, the poet visited successively Nairn, Forres, Aberdeen, and Stonehive; where one of his relations, James Burness, writer in Montrose, met him by appointment, and conducted him into

[1] Morrison, vol. i. p. 80.

the circle of his paternal kindred, among whom he spent two or three days. When William Burness, his father, abandoned his native district, never to revisit it, he, as he used to tell his children, took a sorrowful farewell of his brother on the summit of the last hill from which the roof of their lowly home could be descried; and the old man appears to have ever after kept up an affectionate correspondence with his family. It fell to the poet's lot to communicate his father's death to the Kincardineshire kindred, and after that he seems to have maintained the same sort of correspondence. He now formed a personal acquaintance with these good people, and in a letter to his brother Gilbert, we find him describing them in terms which show the lively interest he took in all their concerns.[1]

"The rest of my stages," says he, "are not worth rehearsing: warm as I was from Ossian's country, where I had seen his very grave, what cared I for fishing towns and fertile carses?" He arrived once more in Edinburgh, on the 16th of September, having travelled about six hundred miles in two-and-twenty days—greatly extended his acquaintance with his own country, and visited some of its most classical scenery—observed something of Highland manners, which must have been as interesting as they were novel to him—and strengthened considerably among the sturdy Jacobites of the North those political opinions which he at this period avowed.

Of the few poems composed during this Highland tour, we have already mentioned two or three. While standing by the Fall of Fyers, near Loch Ness, he wrote with his pencil the vigorous couplets:—

> "Among the heathy hills and rugged woods,
> The roaring Fyers pours his mossy floods," etc.

When at Sir William Murray's of Ochtertyre, he celebrated Miss Murray of Lintrose, commonly called "The Flower of Sutherland," in the song:—

> "Blythe, blythe, and merry was she,
> Blythe was she but and ben," etc.

[1] General Correspondence, No. 32.

And the verses *On Scaring some Wildfowl on Loch Turit*,—

> "Why, ye tenants of the lake,
> For me your wat'ry haunts forsake," etc.

were composed while under the same roof. These last, except perhaps *Bruar Water*, are the best that he added to his collection during the wanderings of the summer. But in Burns's subsequent productions, we find many traces of the delight with which he had contemplated nature in these alpine regions.

The poet once more visited his family at Mossgiel, and Mr Miller at Dalswinton, ere the winter set in; and on more leisurely examination of that gentleman's estate, we find him writing as if he had all but decided to become his tenant on the farm of Elliesland. It was not, however, until he had for the third time visited Dumfriesshire, in March 1788, that a bargain was actually concluded.

More than half of the intervening months were spent in Edinburgh, where Burns found or fancied that his presence was necessary for the satisfactory completion of his affairs with the booksellers. It seems to be clear enough that one great object was the society of his jovial intimates in the capital. Nor was he without the amusement of a little romance to fill up what vacant hours they left him. He lodged that winter in Bristo Street, on purpose to be near a beautiful widow—the same to whom he addressed the song:—

> "Clarinda, mistress of my soul," etc.

and a series of prose epistles, which have been separately published, and which present more instances of bad taste, bombastic language, and fulsome sentiment, than could be produced from all his writings besides.

At this time the publication called *Johnson's Museum of Scottish Song* was going on in Edinburgh; and the editor appears to have early prevailed on Burns to give him his assistance in the arrangement of his materials. Though *Green grow the rashes* is the only song, entirely his, which appears in the first volume, published in 1787, many of the old ballads included in that volume bear traces of

his hand; but in the second volume, which appeared in March, 1788, we find no fewer than five songs by Burns; two that have been already mentioned,[1] and three far better than them, viz. *Theniel Menzies' bonny Mary;* that grand lyric:—

> "Farewell, ye dungeons dark and strong,
> The wretch's destiny,
> Macpherson's time will not be long
> On yonder gallows tree;"

both of which performances bespeak the recent impressions of his Highland visit; and, lastly, *Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad.* Burns had been from his youth upwards an enthusiastic lover of the old minstrelsy and music of his country; but he now studied both subjects with far better opportunities and appliances than he could have commanded previously; and it is from this time that we must date his ambition to transmit his own poetry to posterity, in eternal association with those exquisite airs which had hitherto, in far too many instances, been married to verses that did not deserve to be immortal. It is well known that from this time Burns composed very few pieces but songs; and whether we ought or not to regret that such was the case, must depend on the estimate we make of his songs as compared with his other poems; a point on which critics are to this hour divided, and on which their descendants are not very likely to agree. Mr Walker, who is one of those that lament Burns's comparative dereliction of the species of composition which he most cultivated in the early days of his inspiration, suggests very sensibly, that if Burns had not taken to song-writing, he would probably have written little or nothing amidst the various temptations to company and dissipation which now and henceforth surrounded him—to say nothing of the active duties of life in which he was at length about to be engaged.

Burns was present, on the 31st of December, at a dinner to celebrate the birthday of the unfortunate Prince Charles Edward Stuart, and produced on the occasion an ode, part

[1] *Clarinda* and *How pleasant the banks of the clear winding Devon.*

of which Dr Currie has preserved. The specimen will not induce any regret that the remainder of the piece has been suppressed. It appears to be a mouthing rhapsody —far, far different indeed from the *Chevalier's Lament*, which the poet composed some months afterwards, with probably the tithe of the effort, while riding alone "through a track of melancholy muirs between Galloway and Ayrshire, it being Sunday."[1]

For six weeks of the time that Burns spent this year in Edinburgh, he was confined to his room, in consequence of an overturn in a hackney coach. "Here I am," he writes, "under the care of a surgeon, with a bruised limb extended on a cushion, and the tints of my mind vying with the livid horrors preceding a midnight thunderstorm. A drunken coachman was the cause of the first, and incomparably the lightest evil; misfortune, bodily constitution, hell, and myself, have formed a *quadruple alliance* to guarantee the other. I have taken tooth and nail to the Bible, and am got half way through the five books of Moses, and half way in Joshua. It is really a glorious book. I sent for my bookbinder to-day, and ordered him to get an 8vo Bible in sheets, the best paper and print in town, and bind it with all the elegance of his craft."[2]

In another letter, which opens gaily enough, we find him reverting to the same prevailing darkness of mood. "I can't say I am altogether at my ease when I see anywhere in my path that meagre, squalid, famine-faced spectre, Poverty, attended as he always is by iron-fisted Oppression, and leering Contempt. But I have sturdily withstood his buffetings many a hard-laboured day, and still my motto is *I* DARE. My worst enemy is *moi-même*. There are just two creatures that I would envy—a horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment; the other has neither wish nor fear."[3]

One more specimen of this magnificent hypochondriacism may be sufficient.[4] "These have been six horrible weeks. Anguish and low spirits have made me

[1] General Correspondence, No. 46.
[2] *Reliques*, p. 43.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[4] General Correspondence, No. 43.

unfit to read, write, or think. I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer does a commission; for I would not *take in* any poor ignorant wretch by *selling out*. Lately I was a sixpenny private, and God knows a miserable soldier enough: now I march to the campaign a starving cadet, a little more conspicuously wretched. I am ashamed of all this; for though I do not want bravery for the warfare of life, I could wish, like some other soldiers, to have as much fortitude or cunning as to dissemble or conceal my cowardice."

It seems impossible to doubt that Burns had in fact lingered in Edinburgh, in the hope that, to use a vague but sufficiently expressive phrase, something would be done for him. He visited and revisited a farm,—talked and wrote scholarly and wisely about "having a fortune at the plough-tail," and so forth; but all the while nourished, and assuredly it would have been most strange if he had not, the fond dream that the admiration of his country would ere long present itself in some solid and tangible shape. His illness and confinement gave him leisure to concentrate his imagination on the darker side of his prospects; and the letters which we have quoted may teach those who envy the powers and the fame of genius, to pause for a moment over the annals of literature, and think what superior capabilities of misery have been, in the great majority of cases, interwoven with the possession of those very talents, from which all but their possessors derive unmingled gratification.

Burns's distresses, however, were to be still farther aggravated. While still under the hands of his surgeon, he received intelligence from Mauchline that his intimacy with Jean Armour had once more exposed her to the reproaches of her family. The father sternly and at once turned her out of doors; and Burns, unable to walk across his room, had to write to his friends in Mauchline, to procure shelter for his children, and for her whom he considered as—all but his wife. In a letter to Mrs Dunlop, written on hearing of this new misfortune, he says, "'*I wish I were dead, but I'm no like to die.*' I fear I am something like —undone; but I hope for the best. You must not desert me. Your friendship I think I can count on,

though I should date my letters from a marching regiment. Early in life, and all my life, I reckoned on a recruiting drum as my forlorn hope. Seriously, though, life at present presents me with but a melancholy path——But my limb will soon be sound, and I shall struggle on."[1]

It seems to have been *now* that Burns at last screwed up his courage to solicit the active interference in his behalf of the Earl of Glencairn. The letter is a brief one. Burns could ill endure this novel attitude, and he rushed at once to his request. "I wish," says he, "to get into the excise. I am told your lordship will easily procure me the grant from the commissioners; and your lordship's patronage and kindness, which have already rescued me from obscurity, wretchedness, and exile, embolden me to ask that interest. You have likewise put it in my power to save the little tie of *home*, that sheltered an aged mother, two brothers, and three sisters from destruction. There, my lord, you have bound me over to the highest gratitude.——My heart sinks within me at the idea of applying to any other of The Great who have honoured me with their countenance. I am ill qualified to dog the heels of greatness with the impertinence of solicitation; and tremble nearly as much at the thought of the cold promise as of the cold denial."[2]

It would be hard to think that this letter was coldly or negligently received; on the contrary, we know that Burns's gratitude to Lord Glencairn lasted as long as his life. But the excise appointment which he coveted was not procured by any exertion of his noble patron's influence. Mr Alexander Wood, surgeon (still affectionately remembered in Scotland as "kind old Sandy Wood"), happening to hear Burns, while his patient, mention the object of his wishes, went immediately, without dropping any hint of his intention, and communicated the state of the poet's case to Mr Graham of Fintray, one of the commissioners of excise, who had met Burns at the Duke of Athole's in the autumn, and who immediately had the poet's name put on the roll.

"I have chosen this, my dear friend (thus wrote Burns

[1] *Reliques*, p. 48.
[2] General Correspondence, No. 40.

to Mrs Dunlop), after mature deliberation. The question is not at what door of Fortune's palace shall we enter in; but what doors does she open to us? I was not likely to get anything to do. I wanted *un bût*, which is a dangerous, an unhappy situation. I got this without any hanging on or mortifying solicitation. It is immediate bread, and, though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life. *Besides, the commissioners are some of them my acquaintances, and all of them my firm friends.*"[1]

Our poet seems to have kept up an angry correspondence during his confinement with his bookseller, Mr Creech, whom he also abuses very heartily in his letters to his friends in Ayrshire. The publisher's accounts, however, when they were at last made up, must have given the impatient author a very agreeable surprise; for, in his letter above quoted, to Lord Glencairn, we find him expressing his hopes that the gross profits of his book might amount to "better than £200," whereas, on the day of settling with Mr Creech, he found himself in possession of £500, if not of £600.[2]

This supply came truly in the hour of need; and it seems to have elevated his spirits greatly, and given him for the time a new stock of confidence; for he now resumed immediately his purpose of taking Mr Miller's farm, retaining his excise commission in his pocket as a

[1] *Reliques*, p. 50.

[2] Mr Nicoll, the most intimate friend Burns had at this time, writes to Mr John Lewars, excise officer, at Dumfries, immediately on hearing of the poet's death,—"He certainly told me that he received £600, for the first Edinburgh edition, and £100 afterwards for the copyright" (MS. in my possession). Dr Currie states the gross product of Creech's edition at £500, and Burns himself, in one of his printed letters, at £400 only. Nicoll hints, in the letter already referred to, that Burns had contracted debts while in Edinburgh, which he might not wish to avow on all occasions; and if we are to believe this, and, as is probable, the expense of printing the subscription edition, should, moreover, be deducted from the £700 stated by Mr Nicoll—the apparent contradictions in these stories may be pretty nearly reconciled.—There appears to be reason for thinking that Creech subsequently paid more than £100 for the copyright. If he did not, how came Burns to realise, as Currie states it at the end of his Memoir, "nearly nine hundred pounds in all by his poems?"

dernier resort, to be made use of only should some reverse of fortune come upon him. His first act, however, was to relieve his brother from his difficulties, by advancing £180, or £200, to assist him in the management of Mossgiel. "I give myself no airs on this," he generously says, in a letter to Dr Moore, "for it was mere selfishness on my part. I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that the throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favour, might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning*."[1]

[1] General Correspondence, No. 66.

CHAPTER VII

"To make a happy fireside clime
For weans and wife—
That's the true pathos and sublime
Of human life."

BURNS, as soon as his bruised limb was able for a journey, went to Mossgiel, and went through the ceremony of a Justice-of-Peace marriage with Jean Armour, in the writing-chambers of his friend Gavin Hamilton. He then crossed the country to Dalswinton, and concluded his bargain with Mr Miller as to the farm of Elliesland, on terms which must undoubtedly have been considered by both parties, as highly favourable to the poet; they were indeed fixed by two of Burns's own friends, who accompanied him for that purpose from Ayrshire. The lease was for four successive terms, of nineteen years each,—in all seventy-six years; the rent for the first three years and crops £50; during the remainder of the period £70. Mr Miller bound himself to defray the expense of any plantations which Burns might please to make on the banks of the river; and, the farmhouse and offices being in a dilapidated condition, the new tenant was to receive £300, from the proprietor, for the erection of suitable buildings. "The land," says Allan Cunningham, "was good, the rent moderate, and the markets were rising."

Burns entered on possession of his farm at Whitsuntide, 1788, but the necessary rebuilding of the house prevented his removing Mrs Burns thither until the season was far advanced. He had, moreover, to qualify himself for holding his excise commission by six weeks' attendance on the business of that profession at Ayr. From these circumstances, he led all the summer a wandering and unsettled life, and Dr Currie mentions this as one of his chief misfortunes. The poet, as he says, was con-

tinually riding between Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire, and often spending a night on the road, "sometimes fell into company, and forgot the resolutions he had formed."

What these resolutions were, the poet himself shall tell us. On the 3rd day of his residence at Elliesland, he thus writes to Mr Ainslie: "I have all along hitherto, in the warfare of life, been bred to arms, among the light-horse, the piquet guards of fancy, a kind of hussars and Highlanders of the brain; but I am firmly resolved to sell out of these giddy battalions. Cost what it will, I am determined to buy in among the grave squadrons of heavy-armed thought, or the artillery corps of plodding contrivance. . . . Were it not for the terrors of my ticklish situation respecting a family of children, I am decidedly of opinion that the step I have taken is vastly for my happiness."[1]

To all his friends, he expresses himself in terms of similar satisfaction in regard to his marriage. "Your surmise, madam," he writes to Mrs Dunlop, "is just. I am indeed a husband. I found a once much-loved, and still much-loved female, literally and truly cast out to the mercy of the naked elements, but as I enabled her to *purchase* a shelter; and there is no sporting with a fellow-creature's happiness or misery. The most placid good-nature and sweetness of disposition; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with all its powers to love me; vigorous health and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best advantage by a more than commonly handsome figure; these, I think, in a woman, may make a good wife, though she should never have read a page but the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, nor danced in a brighter assembly than a penny-pay wedding. . . . To jealousy or infidelity I am an equal stranger; my preservative from the first, is the most thorough consciousness of her sentiments of honour, and her attachment to me; my antidote against the last, is my long and deep-rooted affection for her. In housewife matters, of aptness to learn, and activity to execute, she is eminently mistress, and during my absence in Nithsdale, she is regularly and constantly an apprentice to my mother and sisters in their dairy, and other rural business. . . . You are right, that a bachelor state

[1] *Reliques*, p. 63.

would have ensured me more friends; but from a cause you will easily guess, conscious peace in the enjoyment of my own mind, and unmistrusting confidence in approaching my God, would seldom have been of the number."[1]

Some months later he tells Miss Chalmers that his marriage "was not, perhaps, in consequence of the attachment of romance"—(he is addressing a young lady),—"but," he continues, "I have no cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation; and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the country. Mrs Burns believes as firmly as her creed, that I am *le plus bel esprit et le plus honnête homme* in the universe; although she scarcely ever, in her life, except the Scriptures and the Psalms of David in Metre, spent five minutes together on either prose or verse—I must except also a certain late publication of Scots poems, which she has perused very devoutly, and all the ballads of the country, as she has (O the partial lover, you will say) the finest woodnote-wild I ever heard."[2]

It was during this honeymoon, as he calls it, while chiefly resident in a miserable hovel at Elliesland,[3] and only occasionally spending a day or two in Ayrshire, that he wrote the beautiful song:[4]—

"Of a' the airts the wind can blaw I dearly like the west,
For there the bonnie lassie lives, the lassie I lo'e best;
There wildwoods grow, and rivers row, and many a hill between;
But day and night my fancy's flight is ever wi' my Jean.

O blaw, ye westlin winds, blaw saft amang the leafy trees,
Wi' gentle gale, frae muir and dale, bring hame the laden bees,
And bring the lassie back to me, that's aye sae neat and clean;
Ae blink o' her wad banish care, sae lovely is my Jean."

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[1] *See* General Correspondence, No. 53; and *Reliques*, p. 60.

[2] One of Burns's letters, written not long after this, contains a passage strongly marked with his haughtiness of character. "I have escaped," says he, "the fantastic caprice, the apish affectation, with all the other blessed boarding-school acquirements which are *sometimes* to be found among females of the upper ranks, but almost universally pervade the misses of the would-be gentry."—*General Correspondence*, No. 55.

[3] *Reliques*, p. 75.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 273.

"A discerning reader," says Mr Walker, "will perceive that the letters in which he announces his marriage to some of his most respected correspondents, are written in that state when the mind is pained by reflecting on an unwelcome step, and finds relief to itself in seeking arguments to justify the deed, and lessen its disadvantages in the opinion of others."[1] I confess I am not able to discern any traces of this kind of feeling in any of Burns's letters on this interesting and important occasion. Mr Walker seems to take it for granted, that because Burns admired the superior manners and accomplishments of women of the higher ranks of society, he must necessarily, whenever he discovered "the interest which he had the power of creating" in such persons, have aspired to find a wife among them. But it is, to say the least of the matter, extremely doubtful, that Burns, if he had had a mind, could have found any high-born maiden willing to partake such fortunes as his were likely to be, and yet possessed of such qualifications for making him a happy man, as he had ready for his acceptance in his "Bonny Jean." The proud heart of the poet could never have stooped itself to woo for gold; and birth and high-breeding could only have been introduced into a farmhouse to embitter, in the upshot, the whole existence of its inmates. It is very easy to say, that had Burns married an accomplished woman, he *might* have found domestic evenings sufficient to satisfy all the cravings of his mind—abandoned tavern haunts and jollities for ever—and settled down into a regular pattern-character. But it is at least as possible, that consequences of an exactly opposite nature might have ensued. Any marriage, such as Professor Walker alludes to, would, in his case, have been more unequal, than either of those that made Dryden and Addison miserable for life.

Sir Walter Scott, in his Life of the former of these great men, has well described the difficult situation of her, who has "to endure the apparently causeless fluctuation of spirits incident to one doomed to labour incessantly in the feverish exercise of the imagination."—"Unintentional neglect," says he, "and the inevitable relaxation, or rather

[1] Morrison, vol. i. p. lxxxvii.

sinking of spirit, which follows violent mental exertion, are easily misconstrued into capricious rudeness, or intentional offence; and life is embittered by mutual accusation, not the less intolerable because reciprocally unjust."[1] —Such were the difficulties under which the domestic peace both of Addison and Dryden went to wreck; and yet, to say nothing of manners and habits of the highest elegance and polish in either case, they were both of them men of strictly pure and correct conduct in their conjugal capacities; and who can doubt that all these difficulties must have been enhanced tenfold, had any woman of superior condition linked her fortunes with Robert Burns, a man at once of the very warmest animal temperament, and the most wayward and moody of all his melancholy and irritable tribe, who had little vanity that could have been gratified by a species of connexion, which, unless he had found a human angel, must have been continually wounding his pride? But, in truth, these speculations are all worse than worthless. Burns, with all his faults, was an honest and a high-spirited man, and he loved the mother of his children; and had he hesitated to make her his wife, he must have sunk into the callousness of a ruffian, or that misery of miseries, the remorse of a poet.

The Reverend Hamilton Paul takes an original view of this business: "Much praise," says he, "has been lavished on Burns for renewing his engagement with Jean when in the blaze of his fame. . . . The praise is misplaced. We do not think a man entitled to credit or commendation for doing what the law could compel him to perform. Burns was in reality a married man, and it is truly ludicrous to hear him, aware as he must have been, of the indissoluble power of the obligation, though every document was destroyed, talking of himself as a bachelor."[2] There is no justice in these remarks. It is very true, that, by a merciful fiction of the law of Scotland, the female, in Miss Armour's condition, who produces a written promise of marriage, is considered as having furnished evidence of an irregular marriage having taken place between her and

[1] *Life of Dryden*, p. 90.
[2] Paul's *Life of Burns*, p. 45.

her lover; but in this case the female herself had destroyed the document, and lived for many months not only not assuming, but rejecting, the character of Burns's wife; and had she, under such circumstances, attempted to establish a marriage, with no document in her hand, and with no parole evidence to show that any such document had ever existed, to say nothing of proving its exact tenor, but that of her own father, it is clear that no ecclesiastical court in the world could have failed to decide against her. So far from Burns's having all along regarded her as his wife, it is extremely doubtful whether she had ever for one moment considered him as actually her husband, until he declared the marriage of 1788. Burns did no more than justice as well as honour demanded; but the act was one which no human tribunal could have compelled him to perform.

To return to our story. Burns complains sadly of his solitary condition, when living in the only hovel that he found extant on his farm. "I am," says he (September 9th) "busy with my harvest, but for all that most pleasurable part of life called social intercourse, I am here at the very elbow of existence. The only things that are to be found in this country in any degree of perfection, are stupidity, and canting. Prose they only know in graces, etc., and the value of these they estimate as they do their plaiding webs, by the ell. As for the muses, they have as much idea of a rhinoceros as of a poet."[1] And in another letter (September 16th) he says, "This hovel that I shelter in while occasionally here, is pervious to every blast that blows, and every shower that falls, and I am only preserved from being chilled to death by being suffocated by smoke. You will be pleased to hear that I have laid aside idle *éclat*, and bind every day after my reapers."[2]

His house, however, did not take much time in building; nor had he reason to complain of want of society long; nor, it must be added, did Burns bind every day after his reapers.

He brought his wife home to Elliesland about the end of November; and few housekeepers start with a larger

[1] *Reliques*, p. 75. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

provision of young mouths to feed than this couple. Mrs Burns had lain in this autumn, for the second time, of twins, and I suppose "sonsy, smirking, dear-bought Bess,"[1] accompanied her younger brothers and sisters from Mossgiel. From that quarter also Burns brought a whole establishment of servants, male and female, who, of course, as was then the universal custom amongst the small farmers, both of the west and of the south of Scotland, partook, at the same table, of the same fare with their master and mistress.

Elliesland is beautifully situated on the banks of the Nith, about six miles above Dumfries, exactly opposite to the house of Dalswinton, of those noble woods and gardens amidst which Burns's landlord, the ingenious Mr Patrick Miller, found relaxation from the scientific studies and researches in which he so greatly excelled. On the Dalswinton side, the river washes lawns and groves; but over against these the bank rises into a long red *scaur*, of considerable height, along the verge of which, where the bare shingle of the precipice all but overhangs the stream, Burns had his favourite walk, and might now be seen striding alone, early and late, especially when the winds were loud, and the waters below him swollen and turbulent. For he was one of those that enjoy nature most in the more serious and severe of her aspects; and throughout his poetry, for one allusion to the liveliness of spring, or the splendour of summer, it would be easy to point out twenty in which he records the solemn delight with which he contemplated the melancholy grandeur of autumn, or the savage gloom of winter. Indeed, I cannot but think that the result of an exact inquiry into the composition of Burns's poems, would be, that "his vein," like that of Milton, "flowed most happily, from the autumnal equinox to the vernal." Of Lord Byron, we know that his vein flowed best at midnight; and Burns has himself told us that it was his custom "to take a gloamin' shot at the muses."

The poet was accustomed to say, that the most happy period of his life was the first winter he spent at Elliesland,—for the first time under a roof of his own—with

[1] *Poetical Inventory* to Mr Aiken, February, 1786.

his wife and children about him—and in spite of occasional lapses into the melancholy which had haunted his youth, looking forward to a life of well-regulated, and not ill-rewarded, industry. It is known that he welcomed his wife to her rooftree at Elliesland in the song:—

"I hae a wife o' mine ain, I'll partake wi' naebody;
I'll tak cuckold frae nane, I'll gie cuckold to naebody;
I hae a penny to spend—there—thanks to naebody;
I hae naething to lend—I'll borrow frae naebody."

In commenting on this "little lively lucky song," as he well calls it, Mr Allan Cunningham says, "Burns had built his house, he had committed his seed-corn to the ground, he was in the prime, nay the morning of life—health, and strength, and agricultural skill (?) were on his side—his genius had been acknowledged by his country, and rewarded by a subscription, more extensive than any Scottish poet ever received before; no wonder, therefore, that he broke out into voluntary song, expressive of his sense of importance and independence."[1]—Another song was composed in honour of Mrs Burns, during the happy weeks that followed her arrival at Elliesland:—

"O, were I on Parnassus hill,
Or had of Helicon my fill,
That I might catch poetic skill,
To sing how dear I love thee!

But Nith maun be my muse's well,
My muse maun be thy bonny sell,
On Corsincon I'll glower and spell,
And write how dear I love thee."

In the second stanza, the poet rather transgresses the limits of connubial decorum; but, on the whole, these tributes to domestic affection are among the last of his performances that one would wish to lose.

Burns, in his letters of the year 1789, makes many apologies for doing but little in his poetical vocation; his farm, without doubt, occupied much of his attention, but the want of social intercourse, of which he complained on his first arrival in Nithsdale, had by this time totally dis-

[1] Cunningham's *Scottish Songs*, vol. iv. p. 86.

appeared. On the contrary, his company was courted eagerly, not only by his brother-farmers, but by the neighbouring gentry of all classes; and now, too, for the first time, he began to be visited continually in his own house by curious travellers of all sorts, who did not consider, any more than the generous poet himself, that an extensive practice of hospitality must cost more time than he ought to have had, and far more money than he ever had, at his disposal. Meantime, he was not wholly regardless of the muses; for in addition to some pieces which we have already had occasion to notice, he contributed to this year's *Museum*, *The Thames flows proudly to the Sea*; *The lazy mist hangs*, etc.; *The day returns, my bosom burns*; *Tam Glen* (one of the best of his humorous songs); the splendid lyric, *Go fetch to me a pint of wine*, and *My heart's in the Hielands* (in both of which, however, he adopted some lines of ancient songs to the same tunes); *John Anderson*, in part also a *rifacciamento*; the best of all his Bacchanalian pieces, *Willie brewed a peck o' maut*, written in celebration of a festive meeting at the country residence, in Dumfriesshire, of his friend Mr Nicoll of the High School; and lastly, that noblest of all his ballads, *To Mary in Heaven*.

This celebrated poem was, it is on all hands admitted, composed by Burns in September, 1789, on the anniversary of the day on which he heard of the death of his early love, Mary Campbell; but Mr Cromek has thought fit to dress up the story with circumstances which did not occur. Mrs Burns, the only person who could appeal to personal recollection on this occasion, and whose recollections of all circumstances connected with the history of her husband's poems, are represented as being remarkably distinct and vivid, gives what may at first appear a more prosaic edition of the history.[1] According to her, Burns spent that day, though labouring under cold, in the usual work of his harvest, and apparently in excellent spirits. But as the twilight deepened, he appeared to grow "very sad about something," and at length wandered out

[1] I owe these particulars to Mr M'Diarmid, the able editor of the *Dumfries Courier*, and brother of the lamented author of *Lives of British Statesmen*.

into the barnyard, to which his wife, in her anxiety for his health, followed him, entreating him in vain to observe that frost had set in, and to return to the fireside. On being again and again requested to do so, he always promised compliance—but still remained where he was, striding up and down slowly, and contemplating the sky, which was singularly clear and starry. At last Mrs Burns found him stretched on a mass of straw, with his eyes fixed on a beautiful planet "that shone like another moon;" and prevailed on him to come in. He immediately on entering the house, called for his desk, and wrote exactly as they now stand, with all the ease of one copying from memory, the sublime and pathetic verses:—

> "Thou lingering star with lessening ray,
> That lovest to greet the early morn,
> Again thou usher'st in the day
> My Mary from my soul was torn.
> O Mary, dear departed shade,
> Where is thy place of blissful rest;
> See'st thou thy lover lowly laid,
> Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?" etc.

The *Mother's Lament for her Son*, and *Inscription in an Hermitage in Nithsdale*, were also written this year.

From the time when Burns settled himself in Dumfriesshire, he appears to have conducted with much care the extensive correspondence in which his celebrity had engaged him; it is, however, very necessary in judging of these letters, and drawing inferences from their language as to the real sentiments and opinions of the writer, to take into consideration the rank and character of the persons to whom they are severally addressed, and the measure of intimacy which really subsisted between them and the poet. In his letters, as in his conversation, Burns, in spite of all his pride, did something to accommodate himself to his company; and he who did write the series of letters addressed to Mrs Dunlop, Dr Moore, Mr Dugald Stewart, Miss Chalmers, and others, eminently distinguished as these are by purity and nobleness of feeling and perfect propriety of language, presents himself, in other effusions of the same class, in colours which it would be

rash to call his own. In a word, whatever of grossness of thought, or rant, extravagance, and fustian in expression, may be found in his correspondence, ought, I cannot doubt, to be mainly ascribed to his desire of accommodating himself for the moment to the habits and taste of certain buckish tradesmen of Edinburgh, and other such-like persons, whom, from circumstances already sufficiently noticed, he numbered among his associates and friends. That he should have condescended to any such compliances must be regretted; but in most cases, it would probably be quite unjust to push our censure further than this.

The letters that passed between him and his brother Gilbert, are among the most precious of the collection; for there there could be no disguise. That the brothers had entire knowledge of and confidence in each other, no one can doubt; and the plain, manly, affectionate language in which they both write, is truly honourable to them, and to the parents that reared them.

"DEAR BROTHER," writes Gilbert, January 1, 1789, "I have just finished my new-year's day breakfast in the usual form, which naturally makes me call to mind the days of former years, and the society in which we used to begin them; and when I look at our family vicissitudes, 'through the dark postern of time long elapsed,' I cannot help remarking to you, my dear brother, how good the God of seasons is to us; and that, however some clouds may seem to lour over the portion of time before us, we have great reason to hope that all will turn out well."

It was on the same new-year's day, that Burns himself addressed to Mrs Dunlop a letter, part of which is here transcribed—it certainly cannot be read too often.

ELLIESLAND, *New-Year-Day Morning*, 1789.

"This, dear Madam, is a morning of wishes, and would to God that I came under the apostle James's description! —*the prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* In that case, madam, you should welcome in a year full of blessings; everything that obstructs or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment, should be removed, and every pleasure that frail humanity can taste, should be yours. I own myself

so little a Presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought, which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

"This day,—the first Sunday of May,—a breezy, blue-skyed noon sometime about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end of autumn; these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday.

"I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the *Spectator*, 'The Vision of Mirza;' a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables: 'On the 5th day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my forefathers, I always *keep holy*, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer.'

"We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the fox-glove, the wild brier-rose, the budding-birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew, in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plover, in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Æolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave."

Few, it is to be hoped, can read such things as these without delight; none, surely, that taste the elevated pleasure they are calculated to inspire, can turn from them to the well-known issue of Burns's history, without being afflicted. It is difficult to imagine anything more beautiful, more noble, than what such a person as Mrs Dunlop might at this period be supposed to contemplate as the probable tenor of his future life. What fame can bring of happiness he had already tasted: he had overleaped, by the force of his genius, all the painful barriers of society; and there was probably not a man in Scotland who would not have thought himself honoured by seeing Burns under his roof. He had it in his own power to place his poetical reputation on a level with the very highest names, by proceeding in the same course of study and exertion which had originally raised him into public notice and admiration. Surrounded by an affectionate family, occupied but not engrossed by the agricultural labours in which his youth and early manhood had delighted, communing with nature in one of the loveliest districts of his native land, and, from time to time, producing to the world some immortal addition to his verse,—thus advancing in years and in fame, with what respect would not Burns have been thought of; how venerable in the eyes of his contemporaries—how hallowed in those of after generations, would have been the roof of Elliesland, the field on which he "bound every day after his reapers," the solemn river by which he delighted to wander! The plain of Bannockburn would hardly have been holier ground.

The "golden days" of Elliesland, as Dr Currie justly calls them, were not destined to be many. Burns's farming speculations once more failed; and he himself seems to have been aware that such was likely to be the case ere he had given the business many months' trial; for, ere the autumn of 1788 was over, he applied to his patron, Mr Graham of Fintray, for actual employment as an exciseman, and was accordingly appointed to do duty, in that capacity, in the district where his lands were situated. His income, as a revenue officer, was at first only £35; it by and by rose to £50; and sometimes was £70.

These pounds were hardly earned, since the duties of

his new calling necessarily withdrew him very often from the farm, which needed his utmost attention, and exposed him, which was still worse, to innumerable temptations of the kind he was least likely to resist.

I have now the satisfaction of presenting the reader with some particulars of this part of Burns's history, derived from a source which every lover of Scotland and Scottish poetry must be prepared to hear mentioned with respect. It happened that at the time when our poet went to Nithsdale, the father of Mr Allan Cunningham was steward on the estate of Dalswinton: he was, as all who have read the writings of his sons will readily believe, a man of remarkable talents and attainments: he was a wise and good man; a devout admirer of Burns's genius; and one of those sober neighbours who in vain strove, by advice and warning, to arrest the poet in the downhill path, towards which a thousand seductions were perpetually drawing him. Mr Allan Cunningham was, of course, almost a child when he first saw Burns; but he was no common child; and, besides, in what he has to say on this subject, we may be sure we are hearing the substance of his benevolent and sagacious father's observations and reflections. His own boyish recollections of the poet's personal appearance and demeanour will, however, be read with interest.

"I was very young," says Allan Cunningham, "when I first saw Burns. He came to see my father; and their conversation turned partly on farming, partly on poetry, in both of which my father had taste and skill. Burns had just come to Nithsdale; and I think he appeared a shade more swarthy than he does in Nasmyth's picture, and at least ten years older than he really was at the time. His face was deeply marked by thought, and the habitual expression intensely melancholy. His frame was very muscular and well proportioned, though he had a short neck, and something of a ploughman's stoop: he was strong, and proud of his strength. I saw him one evening match himself with a number of masons; and out of five-and-twenty practised hands, the most vigorous young men in the parish, there was only one that could lift the same weight as Burns.

"He had a very manly face, and a very melancholy

look; but on the coming of those he esteemed, his looks brightened up, and his whole face beamed with affection and genius. His voice was very musical. I once heard him read *Tam o' Shanter*. I think I hear him now. His fine manly voice followed all the undulations of the sense, and expressed as well as his genius had done, the pathos and humour, the horrible and the awful, of that wonderful performance. As a man feels, so will he write; and in proportion as he sympathises with his author, so will he read him with grace and effect.

"I said that Burns and my father conversed about poetry and farming. The poet had newly taken possession of his farm of Elliesland,—the masons were busy building his house,—the applause of the world was with him, and a little of its money in his pocket,—in short, he had found a resting-place at last. He spoke with great delight about the excellence of his farm, and particularly about the beauty of the situation. 'Yes,' my father said, 'the walks on the river bank are fine, and you will see from your windows some miles of the Nith; but you will also see several farms of fine rich *holm*,[1] any one of which you might have had. You have made a poet's choice, rather than a farmer's.'

"If Burns had much of a farmer's skill, he had little of a farmer's prudence and economy. I once inquired of James Corrie, a sagacious old farmer, whose ground marched with Elliesland, the cause of the poet's failure. 'Faith,' said he, 'how could he miss but fail, when his servants ate the bread as fast as it was baked? I don't mean figuratively, I mean literally. Consider a little. At that time close economy was necessary to have enabled a man to clear twenty pounds a-year by Elliesland. Now, Burns's own handiwork was out of the question: he neither ploughed, nor sowed, nor reaped, at least like a hard-working farmer; and then he had a bevy of servants from Ayrshire. The lasses did nothing but bake bread, and the lads sat by the fireside, and ate it warm with ale. Waste of time and consumption of food would soon reach to twenty pounds a-year.'"

[1] *Holm* is flat, rich meadow land, intervening between a stream and the general elevation of the adjoining country.

"The truth of the case," says Mr Cunningham, in another letter with which he has favoured me, "the truth is, that if Robert Burns liked his farm, it was more for the beauty of the situation than for the labours which it demanded. He was too wayward to attend to the stated duties of a husbandman, and too impatient to wait till the ground returned in gain the cultivation he bestowed upon it.

"The condition of a farmer, a Nithsdale one, I mean, was then very humble. His one-story house had a covering of straw, and a clay floor; the furniture was from the hands of a country carpenter; and, between the roof and floor, there seldom intervened a smoother ceiling than of rough rods and grassy turf—while a huge lang-settle of black oak for himself, and a carved armchair for his wife, were the only matters out of keeping with the homely looks of his residence. He took all his meals in his own kitchen, and presided regularly among his children and domestics. He performed family worship every evening—except during the hurry of harvest, when that duty was perhaps limited to Saturday night. A few religious books, two or three favourite poets, the history of his country, and his Bible, aided him in forming the minds and manners of the family. To domestic education, Scotland owes as much as to the care of her clergy, and the excellence of her parish schools.

"The picture out of doors was less interesting. The ground from which the farmer sought support, was generally in a very moderate state of cultivation. The implements with which he tilled his land were primitive and clumsy, and his own knowledge of the management of crops exceedingly limited. He plodded on in the regular slothful routine of his ancestors; he rooted out no bushes, he dug up no stones; he drained not, neither did he enclose; and weeds obtained their full share of the dung and the lime, which he bestowed more like a medicine than a meal on his soil. His plough was the rude old Scotch one; his harrows had as often teeth of wood as of iron; his carts were heavy and low-wheeled, or were, more properly speaking, tumbler-cars, so called to distinguish them from trail-cars, both of which were in

common use. On these rude carriages his manure was taken to the field, and his crop brought home. The farmer himself corresponded in all respects with his imperfect instruments. His poverty secured him from risking costly experiments; and his hatred of innovation, made him entrench himself behind a breast-work of old maxims and rustic saws, which he interpreted as oracles delivered against *improvement*. With ground in such condition, with tools so unfit, and with knowledge so imperfect, he sometimes succeeded in wringing a few hundred pounds *Scots* from the farm he occupied. Such was generally the state of agriculture when Burns came to Nithsdale. I know not how far his own skill was equal to the task of improvement—his trial was short and unfortunate. An important change soon took place, by which he was not fated to profit; he had not the foresight to see its approach, nor, probably, the fortitude to await its coming.

"In the year 1790, much of the ground in Nithsdale was leased at seven and ten and fifteen shillings per acre; and the farmer, in his person and his house, differed little from the peasants and mechanics around him. He would have thought his daughter wedded in her degree, had she married a joiner or a mason; and at kirk or market, all men beneath the rank of a "portioner" of the soil mingled together, equals in appearance and importance. But the war which soon commenced, gave a decided impulse to agriculture; the army and navy consumed largely; corn rose in demand; the price augmented; more land was called into cultivation; and, as leases expired, the proprietors improved the grounds, built better houses, enlarged the rents; and the farmer was soon borne on the wings of sudden wealth above his original condition. His house obtained a slated roof, sash-windows, carpeted floors, plastered walls, and even began to exchange the hanks of yarn with which it was formerly hung, for paintings and pianofortes. He laid aside his coat of home-made cloth; he retired from his seat among his servants; he—I am grieved to mention it—gave up family worship as a thing unfashionable, and became a kind of *rustic gentleman*, who rode a blood horse, and galloped home on market nights at the peril of his own neck, and to the terror of every

modest pedestrian.[1] His daughters, too, no longer prided themselves in well-bleached linen and home-made webs; they changed their linsey-wolsey gowns for silk; and so ungracefully did their new state sit upon them, that I have seen their lovers coming in iron-shod clogs to their carpeted floors, and two of the proudest young women in the parish *skaling* dung to their father's potato-field in silk stockings.

"When a change like this took place, and a farmer could, with a dozen years' industry, be able to purchase the land he rented—which many were, and many did—the same, of a still more profitable change might have happened with respect to Elliesland; and Burns, had he stuck by his lease and his plough, would, in all human possibility, have found the independence which he sought, and sought in vain, from the coldness and parsimony of mankind."

Mr Cunningham sums up his reminiscences of Burns at Elliesland in these terms:—

"During the prosperity of his farm, my father often said that Burns conducted himself wisely, and like one anxious for his name as a man, and his fame as a poet. He went to Dunscore Kirk on Sunday, though he expressed oftener than once his dislike to the stern Calvinism of that strict old divine, Mr Kirkpatrick;—he assisted in forming a reading club; and at weddings and house-heatings, and kirns, and other scenes of festivity, he was a welcome guest, universally liked by the young and the old. But the failure of his farming projects, and the limited income with which he was compelled to support an increasing family and an expensive station in life, preyed on his spirits; and, during these fits of despair, he was willing too often to become the companion of the thoughtless and the gross. I am grieved to say, that besides leaving the book too much for the bowl, and grave and wise friends for lewd and reckless companions, he was also in the occasional practice of composing songs, in which he surpassed the licentiousness, as well as the wit and humour,

[1] Mr Cunningham's description accords with the lines of Crabbe:—

> "Who rides his hunter, who his horse adorns,
> Who drinks his wine, and his disbursements scorns,
> Who freely lives, and loves to show he can—
> This is the farmer made the gentleman."

of the old Scottish muse. These have unfortunately found their way to the press, and I am afraid they cannot be recalled.

"In conclusion, I may say, that few men have had so much of the poet about them, and few poets so much of the man;—the man was probably less pure than he ought to have been, but the poet was pure and bright to the last."

The reader must be sufficiently prepared to hear, that from the time when he entered on his excise duties, the poet more and more neglected the concerns of his farm. Occasionally, he might be seen holding the plough, an exercise in which he excelled, and was proud of excelling, or stalking down his furrows, with the white sheet of grain wrapt about him, a "tenty seedsman;" but he was more commonly occupied in far different pursuits. "I am now," says he, in one of his letters, "a poor rascally gauger, condemned to gallop two hundred miles every week, to inspect dirty ponds and yeasty barrels."

Both in verse and in prose he has recorded the feelings with which he first followed his new vocation. His jests on the subject are uniformly bitter. "I have the same consolation," he tells Mr Ainslie, "which I once heard a recruiting sergeant give to his audience in the streets of Kilmarnock: 'Gentlemen, for your further encouragement, I can assure you that ours is the most blackguard corps under the crown, and, consequently, with us an honest fellow has the surest chance of preferment.'" He winds up almost all his statements of his feelings on this matter, in the same strain.

> "I hae a wife and twa wee laddies,
> They maun hae brose and brats o' duddies.
> Ye ken yoursell, my heart right proud is,
> I needna vaunt;
> But I'll sned besoms—thraw saugh-woodies,
> Before they want."

On one occasion, however, he takes a higher tone. "There is a certain stigma," says he to Bishop Geddes, "in the name of Exciseman; but I do not intend to borrow honour from any profession:"—which may perhaps remind the reader of Gibbon's lofty language, on

finally quitting the learned and polished circles of London and Paris, for his Swiss retirement: "I am too modest, or too proud, to rate my value by that of my associates."

Burns, in his perpetual perambulations over the moors of Dumfriesshire, had every temptation to encounter, which bodily fatigue, the blandishments of hosts and hostesses, and the habitual manners of those who acted along with him in the duties of the excise, could present. He was, moreover, wherever he went, exposed to perils of his own, by the reputation which he had earned as a poet, and by his extraordinary powers of entertainment in conversation. From the castle to the cottage, every door flew open at his approach; and the old system of hospitality, then flourishing, rendered it difficult for the most soberly inclined guest to rise from any man's board in the same trim that he sat down to it. The farmer, if Burns was seen passing, left his reapers, and trotted by the side of Jenny Geddes, until he could persuade the bard that the day was hot enough to demand an extra-libation. If he entered an inn at midnight, after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from the cellar to the garret; and ere ten minutes had elapsed, the landlord and all his guests were assembled round the ingle; the largest punchbowl was produced; and

"Be ours this night—who knows what comes to-morrow?"

was the language of every eye in the circle that welcomed him.[1] The stateliest gentry of the county, whenever they had especial merriment in view, called in the wit and eloquence of Burns to enliven their carousals. The famous song of *The Whistle of worth* commemorates a scene of this kind, more picturesque in some of its circumstances than every day occurred, yet strictly in character with the usual tenor of life among this jovial *squirearchy*. Three gentlemen of ancient descent, had met to determine, by a solemn drinking match, who should possess *the*

[1] These particulars are from a letter of David Macculloch, Esq., who, being at this period a very young gentleman, a passionate admirer of Burns, and a capital singer of many of his serious songs, used often, in his enthusiasm, to accompany the poet on his professional excursions.

Whistle, which a common ancestor of them all had earned ages before, in a Bacchanalian contest of the same sort with a noble toper from Denmark; and the poet was summoned to watch over and celebrate the issue of the debate.

> "Then up rose the bard like a prophet in drink,
> Craigdarroch shall soar when creation shall sink;
> But if thou would'st flourish immortal in rhime,
> Come, one bottle more, and have at the sublime."

Nor, as has already been hinted, was he safe from temptations of this kind, even when he was at home, and most disposed to enjoy in quiet the society of his wife and children. Lion-gazers from all quarters beset him; they eat and drank at his cost, and often went away to criticise him and his fare, as if they had done Burns and his *black bowl*[1] great honour in condescending to be entertained for a single evening, with such company and such liquor.

We have on record various glimpses of him, as he appeared while he was half-farmer, half-exciseman; and some of these present him in attitudes and aspects, on which it would be pleasing to dwell. For example, the circumstances under which the verses on *The Wounded Hare* were written, are mentioned generally by the poet himself. James Thomson, son of the occupier of a farm adjoining Elliesland, told Allan Cunningham, that it was he who wounded the animal. "Burns," said this person, "was in the custom, when at home, of strolling by himself in the twilight every evening, along the Nith, and by the *march* between his land and ours. The hares often came and nibbled our wheat-*braird;* and once, in the gloaming,—it was in April,—I got a shot at one, and wounded her: she ran bleeding by Burns, who was pacing up and down by himself, not far from me. He started, and with a bitter curse, ordered me out of his sight, or he would throw me instantly into the Nith. And had I

[1] Burns's famous black punchbowl, of Inverary marble, was the nuptial gift of his father-in-law, Mr Armour, who himself fashioned it. After passing through many hands, it is now in excellent keeping, that of Alexander Hastie, Esq., of London.

stayed, I'll warrant he would have been as good as his word—though I was both young and strong."

Among other curious travellers who found their way about this time to Elliesland, was Captain Grose, the celebrated antiquarian, whom Burns briefly describes as

> "A fine fat fodgel wight—
> Of stature short, but genius bright;"

and who has painted his own portrait, both with pen and pencil, at full length, in his *Olio*. This gentleman's taste and pursuits are ludicrously set forth in the copy of verses:—

> "Hear, Land o' Cakes and brither Scots,
> Frae Maidenkirk to John O'Groats,
> A chield's amang ye takin' notes;" etc.

and, *inter alia*, his love of port is not forgotten. Grose and Burns had too much in common, not to become great friends. The poet's accurate knowledge of Scottish phraseology and customs, was of great use to the researches of the humorous antiquarian; and, above all, it is to their acquaintance that we owe *Tam o' Shanter*. Burns told the story as he had heard it in Ayrshire, in a letter to the Captain, and was easily persuaded to versify it. The poem was the work of one day; and Mrs Burns well remembers the circumstances. He spent most of the day on his favourite walk by the river, where, in the afternoon, she joined him with some of her children. "He was busily engaged *crooning to himself*, and Mrs Burns perceiving that her presence was an interruption, loitered behind with her little ones among the broom. Her attention was presently attracted by the strange and wild gesticulations of the bard, who, now at some distance, was *agonised* with an ungovernable access of joy. He was reciting very loud, and with the tears rolling down his cheeks, those animated verses which he had just conceived:—

> 'Now Tam! O Tam! had thae been queans
> A' plump and strappin' in their teens;
> Their sarks, instead of creeshie flannen,
> Been snaw-white seventeen-hunder[1] linen,—

[1] "The manufacturer's term for a fine linen, woven on a reed of 1700 divisions."—*Cromek.*

Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush o' good blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies!'"[1]

To the last Burns was of opinion that *Tam o' Shanter* was the best of all his productions; and although it does not always happen that poet and public come to the same conclusion on such points, I believe the decision in question has been all but unanimously approved of.

The admirable execution of the piece, so far as it goes, leaves nothing to wish for; the only criticism has been, that the catastrophe appears unworthy of the preparation. Burns might have avoided this error,—if error it be,—had he followed not the Ayrshire, but the Galloway, edition of the legend. According to that tradition, the *Cutty-Sark* who attracted the special notice of the bold intruder on the Satanic ceremonial, was no other than the pretty wife of a farmer residing in the same village with himself, and of whose unholy propensities no suspicion had ever been whispered. The Galloway *Tam* being thoroughly sobered by terror, crept to his bed the moment he reached home after his escape, and said nothing of what had happened to any of his family. He was awakened in the morning with the astounding intelligence that his horse had been found dead in the stable, and a woman's hand, clotted with blood, adhering to the tail. Presently, it was reported, that *Cutty-Sark* had burnt her hand grievously over-night, and was ill in bed, but obstinately refused to let her wound be examined by the village leech. Hereupon Tam, disentangling the bloody hand from the hair of his defunct favourite's tail, proceeded to the residence of the fair witch, and forcibly pulling her stump to view, showed his trophy, and narrated the whole circumstances of the adventure. The poor victim of the black-art was constrained to confess her guilty practices in presence of the priest and the laird, and was forthwith burnt alive,

[1] The above is quoted from a MS. journal of Cromek. Mr M'Diarmid confirms the statement, and adds, that the poet, having committed the verses to writing on the top of his *sod-dyke* over the water, came into the house, and read them immediately in high triumph at the fireside.

under their joint auspices, within watermark on the Solway Frith.

Such, Mr Cunningham informs me, is the version of this story current in Galloway and Dumfriesshire: but it may be doubted whether, even if Burns was acquainted with it, he did not choose wisely in adhering to the Ayrshire legend, as he had heard it in his youth. It is seldom that tales of popular superstition are effective in proportion to their completeness of solution and catastrophe. On the contrary, they, like the creed to which they belong, suffer little in a picturesque point of view, by exhibiting a maimed and fragmentary character, that in nowise satisfies strict taste, either critical or moral. Dreams based in darkness, may fitly terminate in a blank: the cloud opens, and the cloud closes. The absence of definite scope and purpose, appears to be of the essence of the mythological *grotesque*.

Burns lays the scene of this remarkable performance almost on the spot where he was born; and all the terrific circumstances by which he has marked the progress of Tam's midnight journey, are drawn from local tradition.

> "By this time he was cross the ford
> Whare in the snaw the chapman smoor'd,
> And past the birks and meikle stane,
> Whare drucken Charlie brak's neck-bane;
> And through the whins, and by the cairn,
> Whare hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
> And near the thorn, aboon the well,
> Whare Mungo's mither hang'd hersell."

None of these tragic memoranda were derived from imagination. Nor was Tam o' Shanter himself an imaginary character. Shanter is a farm close to Kirkoswald's, that smuggling village, in which Burns, when nineteen years old, studied mensuration, and "first became acquainted with scenes of swaggering riot." The then occupier of Shanter, by name Douglas Grahame, was, by all accounts, equally what the Tam of the poet appears,—a jolly, careless rustic, who took much more interest in the contraband traffic of the coast, than the rotation of crops. Burns knew the man well; and to his dying day, he, nothing loath, passed among his rural compeers by the name of Tam o' Shanter.[1]

[1] The above information is derived from Mr R. Chambers.

A few words will bring us to the close of Burns's career at Elliesland. Mr Ramsay of Ochtertyre, happening to pass through Nithsdale in 1790, met Burns riding rapidly near Closeburn. The poet was obliged to pursue his professional journey, but sent on Mr Ramsay and his fellow-traveller to Elliesland, where he joined them as soon as his duty permitted him, saying, as he entered, "I come, to use the words of Shakspeare, *stewed in haste*." Mr Ramsay was "much pleased with his *uxor Sabina qualis*, and his modest mansion, so unlike the habitation of ordinary rustics." He told his guests he was preparing to write a drama, which he was to call "*Rob M'Quechan's Elshin*, from a popular story of King Robert the Bruce being defeated on the Carron, when the heel of his boot having loosened in the flight, he applied to one Robert M'Quechan to fix it; who, to make sure, ran his awl nine inches up the King's heel." The evening was spent delightfully. A gentleman of dry temperament, who looked in accidentally, soon partook the contagion, and sat listening to Burns with the tears running over his cheeks. "Poor Burns!" says Mr Ramsay, "from that time I met him no more."

The summer after, some English travellers, calling at Elliesland, were told that the poet was walking by the river. They proceeded in search of him, and presently, "on a rock that projected into the stream, they saw a man employed in angling, of a singular appearance. He had a cap made of a fox's skin on his head; a loose great-coat, fastened round him by a belt, from which depended an enormous Highland broadsword. (Was he still dreaming of the Bruce?) It was Burns. He received them with great cordiality, and asked them to share his humble dinner." These travellers also classed the evening they spent at Elliesland with the brightest of their lives.

Towards the close of 1791, the poet, finally despairing of his farm, determined to give up his lease, which the kindness of his landlord rendered easy of arrangement; and procuring an appointment to the Dumfries division, which raised his salary from the revenue to £70 per annum, removed his family to the county town, in which

he terminated his days. His conduct as an excise officer had hitherto met with uniform approbation; and he nourished warm hopes of being promoted, when he had thus avowedly devoted himself altogether to the service.

He left Elliesland, however, with a heavy heart. The affection of his neighbours was rekindled in all its early fervour by the thoughts of parting with him: and the *roup* of his farming-stock and other effects, was, in spite of whisky, a very melancholy scene. The competition for his chattels (says Allan Cunningham) was eager, each being anxious to secure a memorandum of Burns's residence among them.

It is pleasing to know, that among other "titles manifold" to their respect and gratitude, Burns, at the suggestion of Mr Riddel of Friars'-Carse, had superintended the formation of a subscription library in the parish. His letters to the booksellers on this subject do him much honour: his choice of authors (which business was naturally left to his discretion) being in the highest degree judicious. Such institutions are now common, almost universal, indeed, in the rural districts of southern Scotland; but it should never be forgotten that Burns was among the first, if not the very first, to set the example. "He was so good," says Mr Riddel, "as to take the whole management of this concern; he was treasurer, librarian, and censor, to our little society, who will long have a grateful sense of his public spirit, and exertions for their improvement and information."[1]

Once, and only once, did Burns quit his residence at Elliesland to revisit Edinburgh. His object was to close accounts with Creech; that business accomplished, he returned immediately, and he never again saw the capital. He thus writes to Mrs Dunlop:—"To a man who has a home, however humble and remote, if that home is, like mine, the scene of domestic comfort, the bustle of Edinburgh will soon be a business of sickening disgust—

'Vain pomp and glory of the world, I hate you!'

"When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling

[1] Letter to Sir John Sinclair, Bart., in the Statistical Account of Scotland, parish of Dunscore.

equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim, what merits had he had, or what demerits have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule, and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I kicked into the world, the sport of folly or the victim of pride . . . often as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Princes Street, it has suggested itself to me as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a perspective." There is bitterness in this badinage.

CHAPTER VIII

"The King's most humble servant, I
Can scarcely spare a minute;
But I am yours at dinner-time,
Or else the devil's in it." [1]

THE four principal biographers of our poet, Heron, Currie, Walker, and Irving, concur in the general statement, that his moral course from the time when he settled in Dumfries, was downwards. Heron knew more of the matter personally than any of the others, and his words are these:—"In Dumfries his dissipation became still more deeply habitual. He was here exposed more than in the country, to be solicited to share the riot of the dissolute and the idle. Foolish young men, such as writers' apprentices, young surgeons, merchants' clerks, and his brother excisemen, flocked eagerly about him, and from time to time pressed him to drink with them, that they might enjoy his wicked wit. The Caledonian Club, too, and the Dumfries and Galloway Hunt, had occasional meetings in Dumfries after Burns came to reside there, and the poet was of course invited to share their hospitality, and hesitated not to accept the invitation. The morals of the town were, in consequence of its becoming so much the scene of public amusement, not a little corrupted, and though a husband and a father, Burns did not escape suffering by the general contamination, in a manner which I forbear to describe. In the intervals between his different fits of intemperance, he suffered the keenest anguish of remorse and horribly afflictive foresight. His Jean behaved with a degree of maternal and conjugal tenderness and prudence, which made him feel more bitterly the evils of his misconduct, though they could not reclaim him."

[1] "The above answer to an invitation was written extempore on a leaf torn from his Excise-book."—*Cromek's MSS*

This picture, dark as it is, wants some distressing shades that mingle in the parallel one by Dr Currie; it wants nothing, however, of which truth demands the insertion. That Burns, dissipated enough long ere he went to Dumfries, became still more dissipated in a town, than he had been in the country, is certain. It may also be true, that his wife had her own particular causes, sometimes, for dissatisfaction. But that Burns ever sunk into a toper—that he ever was addicted to solitary drinking—that his bottle ever interfered with his discharge of his duties as an exciseman—or that, in spite of some transitory follies, he ever ceased to be a most affectionate husband—all these charges have been insinuated—and they are all false. His intemperance was, as Heron says, in *fits;* his aberrations of all kinds were occasional not systematic; they were all to himself the sources of exquisite misery in the retrospect; they were the aberrations of a man whose moral sense was never deadened, of one who encountered more temptations from without and from within, than the immense majority of mankind, far from having to contend against, are even able to imagine;—of one, finally, who prayed for pardon, where alone effectual pardon could be found;—and who died ere he had reached that term of life up to which the passions of many, who, their mortal career being regarded as a whole, are honoured as among the most virtuous of mankind, have proved too strong for the control of reason. We have already seen that the poet was careful of decorum in all things during the brief space of his prosperity at Elliesland, and that he became less so on many points, as the prospects of his farming speculation darkened around him. It seems to be equally certain, that he entertained high hopes of promotion in the excise at the period of his removal to Dumfries; and that the comparative recklessness of his later conduct there, was consequent on a certain overclouding of these professional expectations. The case is broadly stated so by Walker and Paul; and there are hints to the same effect in the narrative of Currie.

The statement has no doubt been exaggerated, but it has its foundation in truth; and by the kindness of Mr Train, supervisor at Castle Douglas in Galloway, I shall

presently be enabled to give some details which may throw light on this business.

Burns was much patronised when in Edinburgh by the Honourable Henry Erskine, Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, and other leading Whigs of the place—much more so, to their honour be it said, than by any of the influential adherents of the then administration. His landlord at Ellisland, Mr Miller of Dalswinton, his neighbour, Mr Riddel of Friars'-Carse, and most of the other gentlemen who showed him special attention, belonged to the same political party; and, on his removal to Dumfries, it so happened, that some of his immediate superiors in the revenue service of the district, and other persons of standing and authority, into whose society he was thrown, entertained sentiments of the same description.

Burns, whenever in his letters he talks seriously of political matters, uniformly describes his early jacobitism as mere "matter of fancy." It may, however, be easily believed, that a fancy like his, long indulged in dreams of that sort, was well prepared to pass into certain other dreams which had, as calm men now view the matter, but little in common with them, except that both alike involved some feeling of dissatisfaction with "the existing order of things." Many of the old elements of political disaffection in Scotland, put on a new shape at the outbreaking of the French Revolution; and jacobites became half-jacobins, ere they were at all aware in what the doctrines of jacobinism were to end. The Whigs naturally regarded the first dawn of freedom in France with feelings of sympathy, delight, exultation; in truth, few good men of any party regarded it with more of fear than of hope. The general, the all but universal tone of feeling was favourable to the first assailants of the Bourbon despotism; and there were few who more ardently participated in the general sentiment of the day than Burns.

The revulsion of feeling that took place in this country at large, when wanton atrocities began to stain the course of the French Revolution, and Burke lifted up his powerful voice to denounce its leaders, as, under pretence of love for freedom, the enemies of all social order, morality,

and religion, was violent in proportion to the strength and ardour of the hopes in which good men had been eager to indulge, and cruelly disappointed. The great body of the Whigs, however, were slow to abandon the cause which they had espoused; and although their chiefs were wise enough to draw back when they at length perceived that serious plans for overturning the political institutions of our own country had been hatched and fostered, under the pretext of admiring and comforting the destroyers of a foreign tyranny—many of their provincial retainers, having uttered their sentiments all along with provincial vehemence and openness, found it no easy matter to retreat gracefully along with them. Scenes more painful at the time, and more so even now in the retrospect, than had for generations afflicted Scotland, where the consequences of the rancour into which party feelings on both sides now rose and fermented. Old and dear ties of friendship were torn in sunder; society was for a time shaken to its centre. In the most extravagant dreams of the jacobites there had always been much to command respect, high chivalrous devotion, reverence for old affections, ancestral loyalty, and the generosity of romance. In the new species of hostility, everything seemed mean as well as perilous; it was scorned even more than hated. The very name stained whatever it came near; and men that had known and loved each other from boyhood, stood aloof, if this influence interfered, as if it had been some loathsome pestilence.

There was a great deal of stately Toryism at this time in the town of Dumfries, which was the favourite winter retreat of many of the best gentlemen's families of the south of Scotland. Feelings that worked more violently in Edinburgh than in London, acquired additional energy still, in this provincial capital. All men's eyes were upon Burns. He was the standing marvel of the place; his toasts, his jokes, his epigrams, his songs, were the daily food of conversation and scandal; and he, open and careless, and thinking he did no great harm in saying and singing what many of his superiors had not the least objection to hear and applaud, soon began to be considered among the local admirers and disciples of the good old

King and his minister, as the most dangerous of all the apostles of sedition,—and to be shunned accordingly.

A gentleman of that county, whose name I have already more than once had occasion to refer to, has often told me, that he was seldom more grieved, than when riding into Dumfries one fine summer's evening, about this time, to attend a county-ball, he saw Burns walking alone, on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite side was gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom appeared willing to recognise him. The horseman dismounted and joined Burns, who, on his proposing to him to cross the street, said, "Nay, nay, my young friend,—that's all over now;" and quoted, after a pause, some verses of Lady Grizzel Baillie's pathetic ballad:—

"His bonnet stood ance fu' fair on his brow,
His auld ane look'd better than mony ane's new;
But now he lets't wear ony way it will hing,
And casts himsell dowie upon the corn-bing.

O were we young, as we ance hae been,
We sud hae been galloping doun on yon green,
And linking it ower the lilywhite lea,—
And werena my heart light I wad die."

It was little in Burns's character to let his feelings on certain subjects, escape in this fashion. He, immediately after citing these verses, assumed the sprightliness of his most pleasing manner; and taking his young friend home with him, entertained him very agreeably until the hour of the ball arrived, with a bowl of his usual potation, and Bonnie Jean's singing of some verses which he had recently composed. But this incident belongs, probably, to a somewhat later period of our poet's residence in Dumfries.

The records of the Excise-Office are silent concerning the suspicions which the Commissioners of the time certainly took up in regard to Burns as a political offender —according to the phraseology of the tempestuous period, a *democrat*. In that department, as then conducted, I am assured that nothing could have been more unlike the usual course of things, than that one syllable should have

been set down in writing on such a subject, unless the case had been one of extremities. That an inquiry was instituted, we know from Burns's own letters—and what the exact termination of the inquiry was, can no longer, it is probable, be ascertained.

According to the tradition of the neighbourhood, Burns, *inter alia*, gave great offence by demurring in a large mixed company to the proposed toast, "the health of William Pitt;" and left the room in indignation, because the society rejected what he wished to substitute, namely, "the health of a greater and a better man, George Washington." I suppose the warmest admirer of Mr Pitt's talents and politics would hardly venture nowadays to dissent substantially from Burns's estimate of the comparative merits of these two great men. The name of Washington, at all events, when contemporary passions shall have finally sunk into the peace of the grave, will unquestionably have its place in the first rank of heroic virtue,—a station which demands the exhibition of victory pure and unstained over temptations and trials extraordinary, in kind as well as strength. But at the time when Burns, being a servant of Mr Pitt's government, was guilty of this indiscretion, it is obvious that a great deal "more was meant than reached the ear.

In the poet's own correspondence, we have traces of another occurrence of the same sort. Burns thus writes to a gentleman at whose table he had dined the day before:—"I was, I know, drunk last night, but I am sober this morning. From the expressions Captain —— made use of to me, had I had nobody's welfare to care for but my own, we should certainly have come, according to the manner of the world, to the necessity of murdering one another about the business. The words were such as generally, I believe, end in a brace of pistols: but I am still pleased to think that I did not ruin the peace and welfare of a wife and children in a drunken squabble. Farther, you know that the report of certain political opinions being mine, has already once before brought me to the brink of destruction. I dread lest last night's business may be interpreted in the same way. You, I beg, will take care to prevent it. I tax your wish for Mrs

Burns's welfare with the task of waiting on every gentleman who was present to state this to him; and, as you please, show this letter. What, after all, was the obnoxious toast? *May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause*—a toast that the most outrageous frenzy of loyalty cannot object to."

Burns has been commended, sincerely by some, and ironically by others, for putting up with the treatment which he received on this occasion, without calling Captain —— to account the next morning; and one critic, the last I am sure that would have wished to say anything unkindly about the poet, has excited indignation in the breast of Mr Peterkin, by suggesting that Burns really had not, at any period of his life, those delicate feelings on certain matters, which, it must be admitted, no person in Burns's original rank and station is ever expected to act upon. The question may be safely intrusted to the good sense of all who can look to the case without passion or personal irritation. No human being will ever dream that Robert Burns was a coward: as for the poet's toast about the success of the war, there can be no doubt that only one meaning was given to it by all who heard it uttered; and as little that a gentleman bearing the King's commission in the army, if he was entitled to resent the sentiment at all, lost no part of his right to do so, because it was announced in a quibble.

Burns, no question, was guilty of unpoliteness as well as indiscretion, in offering any such toasts as these in mixed company; but that such toasts should have been considered as attaching any grave suspicion to his character as a loyal subject, is a circumstance which can only be accounted for by reference to the exaggerated state of political feelings on all matters, and among all descriptions of men, at that melancholy period of disaffection, distrust, and disunion. Who, at any other than that lamentable time, would ever have dreamed of erecting the drinking, or declining to drink, the health of a particular minister, or the approving, or disapproving, of a particular measure of government, into the test of a man's loyalty to his King? The poet Crabbe has, in one of his masterly sketches, given us, perhaps, a more vivid delineation of

the jarrings and collisions which were at this period the perpetual curse of society than the reader may be able to find elsewhere. He has painted the sturdy Tory mingling accidentally in a company of those who would not, like Burns, drink "the health of William Pitt;" and suffering sternly and sulkily under the infliction of their, to him, horrible doctrines . . .

> "Now, dinner past, no longer he supprest
> His strong dislike to be a silent guest;
> Subjects and words were now at his command—
> When disappointment frown'd on all he plann'd.
> For, hark! he heard, amazed, on every side,
> His church insulted, and her priests belied,
> The laws reviled, the ruling powers abused,
> The land derided, and her foes excused—
> He heard and ponder'd. What to men so vile
> Should be his language? For his threatening style
> They were too many. If his speech were meek,
> They would despise such poor attempts to speak—
> —There were reformers of each different sort,
> Foes to the laws, the priesthood, and the court;
> Some on their favourite plans alone intent,
> Some purely angry and malevolent;
> The rash were proud to blame their country's laws,
> The vain to seem supporters of *a cause;*
> One call'd for change that he would dread to see,
> Another sigh'd for Gallic liberty;
> And numbers joining with the forward crew,
> For no one reason—but that many do—
> —How, said the Justice, can this trouble rise—
> This shame and pain, from creatures I despise?"—

And he has also presented the champion of loyalty as surrounded with kindred spirits, and amazed with the audacity of an intrusive democrat, with whom he has now no more cause to keep terms than such gentlemen as "Captain ——" were wont to do with Robert Burns.

> "Is it not known, agreed, confirm'd, confest,
> That of all peoples we are govern'd best?
> —And live there those in such all-glorious state,
> Traitors protected in the land they hate,
> Rebels still warring with the laws that give
> To them subsistence?—Yes, such wretches live!
> The laws that nursed them they blaspheme; the laws—
> Their Sovereign's glory—and their country's cause;—
> And who their mouth, their master fiend; and who
> Rebellion's oracle?—You, caitiff, you!

—O could our country from her coasts expel
Such foes, and nourish those that wish her well!
This her mild laws forbid, but *we* may still
From *us* eject them by our sovereign will—
This let us do . . .
He spoke, and, seated with his former air,
Look'd his full self, and fill'd his ample chair;
Took one full bumper to each favourite cause,
And dwelt all night on politics and laws,
With high applauding voice which gain'd him high applause."

Burns, eager of temper, loud of tone, and with declamation and sarcasm equally at command, was, we may easily believe, the most hated of human beings, because the most dreaded, among the provincial champions of the administration of which he thought fit to disapprove. But that he ever, in his most ardent moods, upheld the principles of those whose applause of the French Revolution was but the mask of revolutionary designs at home, after these principles had been really developed by those that maintained them, and understood by him, it may be safely denied. There is not, in all his correspondence, one syllable to give countenance to such a charge.

His indiscretion, however, did not always confine itself to words; and though an incident now about to be recorded, belongs to the year 1792, before the French war broke out, there is reason to believe that it formed the main subject of the inquiry which the Excise Commissioners thought themselves called upon to institute touching the politics of our poet.

At that period a great deal of contraband traffic, chiefly from the Isle of Man, was going on along the coasts of Galloway and Ayrshire, and the whole of the revenue officers from Gretna to Dumfries, were placed under the orders of a superintendent residing in Annan, who exerted himself zealously in intercepting the descent of the smuggling vessels. On the 27th of February, a suspicious-looking brig was discovered in the Solway Frith, and Burns was one of the party whom the superintendent conducted to watch her motions. She got into shallow water the day afterwards, and the officers were enabled to discover that her crew were numerous, armed, and not likely to yield without a struggle. Lewars, a brother exciseman, an inti-

mate friend of our poet, was accordingly sent to Dumfries for a guard of dragoons; the superintendent, Mr Crawford, proceeded himself on a similar errand to Ecclefechan, and Burns was left with some men under his orders, to watch the brig, and prevent landing or escape. From the private journal of one of the excisemen (now in my hands), it appears that Burns manifested considerable impatience while thus occupied, being left for many hours in a wet salt-marsh, with a force which he knew to be inadequate for the purpose it was meant to fulfil. One of his comrades hearing him abuse his friend Lewars in particular, for being slow about his journey, the man answered, that he also wished the devil had him for his pains, and that Burns, in the meantime, would do well to indite a song upon the sluggard: Burns said nothing; but after taking a few strides by himself among the reeds and shingle, rejoined his party, and chanted to them the well-known ditty, *The Deil's run awa' wi' the Exciseman.*[1] Lewars arrived shortly afterwards with his dragoons; and Burns, putting himself at their head, waded, sword in hand, to the brig, and was the first to board her. The crew lost heart, and submitted, though their numbers were greater than those of the assailing force. The vessel was condemned, and, with all her arms and stores, sold by auction next day at Dumfries: upon which occasion, Burns, whose behaviour had been highly commended, thought fit to purchase four carronades, by way of trophy. But his glee went a step farther;—he sent the guns, with a letter, to the French Convention, requesting that body to accept of them as a mark of his admiration and respect. The present, and its accompaniment, were intercepted at the custom-house at Dover; and here, there appears to be little room to doubt, was the principal circumstance that drew on Burns the notice of his jealous superiors.

We were not, it is true, at war with France; but every one knew and felt that we were to be so ere long; and nobody can pretend that Burns was not guilty, on this

[1] The account in the *Reliques* of this song being composed for "a festive meeting of all the Excise-officers, in Scotland," is therefore incorrect. Mr Train, moreover, assures me, that there never was any such meeting.

occasion, of a most absurd and presumptuous breach of decorum.

When he learned the impression that had been created by his conduct, and its probable consequences, he wrote to his patron, Mr Graham of Fintray, the following letter:—

"*December* 1792.

"Sir,—I have been surprised, confounded, and distracted by Mr Mitchell, the collector, telling me that he has received an order from your board to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to government. Sir, you are a husband and a father. You know what you would feel to see the much-loved wife of your bosom, and your helpless, prattling little ones turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced, from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost without the necessary support of a miserable existence. Alas! sir, must I think that such soon will be my lot? and from the damned dark insinuations of hellish, groundless envy too? I believe, sir, I may aver it, and in the sight of Omniscience, that I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not though even worse horrors, if worse can be, than those I have mentioned, hung over my head. And I say that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie. To the British Constitution, on revolution principles, next, after my God, I am most devoutly attached. You, sir, have been much and generously my friend. Heaven knows how warmly I have felt the obligation, and how greatly I have thanked you. Fortune, sir, has made you powerful, and me impotent; has given you patronage, and me dependence. I would not, for my single self, call on your humanity: were such my insular, unconnected situation, I would disperse the tear that now swells in mine eye; I could brave misfortune; I could face ruin; at the worst, 'death's thousand doors stand open.' But, good God! the tender concerns that I have mentioned, the claims and ties that I see at this moment, and feel around me, how they unnerve courage and wither resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your

esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due. To these, sir, permit me to appeal. By these may I adjure you to save me from that misery which threatens to overwhelm me; and which, with my latest breath I will say, I have not deserved!"

On the 2nd of January, (a week or two afterwards) we find him writing to Mrs Dunlop in these terms:—(The good lady had been offering him some interest with the Excise board in the view of promotion.) "Mr C. can be of little service to me at present; at least, I should be shy of applying. I cannot probably be settled as a supervisor for several years. I must wait the rotation of lists, etc. Besides, some envious malicious devil has raised a little demur on my political principles, and I wish to let that matter settle before I offer myself too much in the eye of my superiors. I have set henceforth a seal on my lips, as to these unlucky politics; but to you I must breathe my sentiments. In this, as in everything else, I shall show the undisguised emotions of my soul. War, I deprecate: misery and ruin to thousands are in the blast that announces the destructive demon. But——"

"The remainder of this letter," says Cromek, "has been torn away by some barbarous hand." I can have no doubt that it was torn away by one of the kindest hands in the world—that of Mrs Dunlop herself.

The exact result of the Excise Board's investigation is hidden, as has been said above, in obscurity; nor is it at all likely that the cloud will be withdrawn hereafter. A general impression, however, appears to have gone forth, that the affair terminated in something which Burns himself considered as tantamount to the destruction of all hope of future promotion in his profession; and it has been insinuated by almost every one of his biographers, that the crushing of these hopes operated unhappily, even fatally, on the tone of his mind, and, in consequence, on the habits of his life. In a word, the early death of Burns has been (by implication at least) ascribed mainly to the circumstances in question. Even Sir Walter Scott has distinctly intimated his acquiescence in this prevalent notion. "The political predilections," says he, "for they could hardly be termed principles, of Burns, were entirely

determined by his feelings. At his first appearance, he felt, or affected, a propensity to Jacobitism. Indeed, a youth of his warm imagination in Scotland thirty years ago,[1] could hardly escape this bias. The side of Charles Edward was that, not surely of sound sense and sober reason, but of romantic gallantry and high achievement. The inadequacy of the means by which that prince attempted to regain the crown forfeited by his fathers, the strange and almost poetical adventures which he underwent,—the Scottish martial character, honoured in his victories, and degraded and crushed in his defeat,—the tales of the veterans who had followed his adventurous standard, were all calculated to impress upon the mind of a poet a warm interest in the cause of the House of Stuart. Yet the impression was not of a very serious cast; for Burns himself acknowledges in one of his letters (*Reliques*, p. 240,) that, 'to tell the matter of fact, except when my passions were heated by some accidental cause, my Jacobitism was merely by way of *vive la bagatelle*.' The same enthusiastic ardour of disposition swayed Burns in his choice of political tenets, when the country was agitated by revolutionary principles. That the poet should have chosen the side on which high talents were most likely to procure celebrity; that he to whom the fastidious distinctions of society were always odious, should have listened with complacence to the voice of French philosophy, which denounced them as usurpations on the rights of man, was precisely the thing to be expected. Yet we cannot but think, that if his superiors in the Excise department had tried the experiment of soothing rather than irritating his feelings, they might have spared themselves the *disgrace* of rendering desperate the possessor of such uncommon talents. For it is *but too certain*, that from the moment his hopes of promotion were utterly blasted, his tendency to dissipation hurried him precipitately into those excesses which shortened his life. We doubt not, that in that awful period of national discord, he had done and said enough to deter, in ordinary cases, the servants of government from countenancing an avowed partizan of faction. But this partizan was Burns! Surely

[1] *Quarterly Review* for February 1809.

the experiment of lenity might have been tried, and perhaps successfully. The conduct of Mr Graham of Fintray, our poet's only shield against actual dismission and consequent ruin, reflects the highest credit on that gentleman."

In the general strain of sentiment in this passage, who can refuse to concur? but I am bound to say, that after a careful examination of all the documents, printed and MS., to which I have had access, I have great doubts as to some of the principal facts assumed in the eloquent statement. I have before me, for example, a letter of Mr Findlater, formerly collector at Glasgow, who was, at the period in question, Burns's immediate superior in the Dumfries district, in which that very respectable person distinctly says:—"I may venture to assert, that when Burns was accused of a leaning to democracy, and an inquiry into his conduct took place, he was subjected, in consequence thereof, to no more than perhaps a verbal or private caution to be more circumspect in future. Neither do I believe his promotion was thereby affected, as has been stated. That, had he lived, would, I have every reason to think, have gone on in the usual routine. His good and steady friend Mr Grahame would have attended to this. What cause, therefore, was there for depression of spirits on this account? or how should he have been hurried thereby to a premature grave? *I* never saw his spirit fail till he was borne down by the pressure of disease and bodily weakness; and even then it would occasionally revive, and like an expiring lamp, emit bright flashes to the last."[1]

When the war had fairly broken out, a battalion of volunteers was formed in Dumfries, and Burns was an original member of the corps. It is very true that his accession was objected to by some of his neighbours; but these were over-ruled by the gentlemen who took the lead in the business, and the poet soon became, as might have been expected, the greatest possible favourite with his brothers in arms. His commanding officer, Colonel De Peyster, attests his zealous discharge of his duties as a member of the corps; and their attachment to him was

[1] Letter to Donald Horne, Esq., W.S., Edinburgh.

on the increase to the last. He was their laureate, and in that capacity did more good service to the government of the country, at a crisis of the darkest alarm and danger, than perhaps any one person of his rank and station, with the exception of Dibdin, had the power or the inclination to render. "Burns," says Allan Cunningham, "was a zealous lover of his country, and has stamped his patriotic feelings in many a lasting verse. . . . His *poor and honest Sodger* laid hold at once on the public feeling, and it was everywhere sung with an enthusiasm which only began to abate when Campbell's *Exile of Erin* and *Wounded Hussar* were published. Dumfries, which sent so many of her sons to the wars, rung with it from port to port; and the poet, wherever he went, heard it echoing from house and hall. I wish this exquisite and useful song, with *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*,—the *Song of Death*, and *Does haughty Gaul Invasion Threat*—all lyrics which enforce a love of country, and a martial enthusiasm into men's breasts, had obtained some reward for the poet. His perishable conversation was remembered by the rich to his prejudice—his imperishable lyrics were rewarded only by the admiration and tears of his fellow peasants."

Lastly, whatever the rebuke of the Excise Board amounted to—(Mr James Gray, at that time schoolmaster in Dumfries, and seeing much of Burns both as the teacher of his children, and as a personal friend and associate of literary taste and talent, is the only person who gives anything like an exact statement; and according to him, Burns was admonished "that it was his business to act, not to think")—in whatever language the censure was clothed, the Excise Board did nothing from which Burns had any cause to suppose that his hopes of ultimate promotion were extinguished. Nay, if he had taken up such a notion, rightly or erroneously, Mr Findlater, who had him constantly under his eye, and who enjoyed all his confidence, and who enjoyed then, as he still enjoys, the utmost confidence of the Board, must have known the fact to be so. Such, I cannot help thinking, is the fair view of the case: at all events, we know that Burns, the year before he died, was permitted to *act* as a *Supervisor;* a thing not likely to have occurred had

there been any resolution against promoting him in his proper order to a permanent situation of that superior rank.

On the whole, then, I am of opinion that the Excise Board have been dealt with harshly, when men of eminence have talked of their conduct to Burns as affixing *disgrace* to them. It appears that Burns, being guilty unquestionably of great indiscretion and indecorum both of word and deed, was admonished in a private manner, that at such a period of national distraction, it behoved a public officer, gifted with talents and necessarily with influence like his, very carefully to abstain from conduct which, now that passions have had time to cool, no sane man will say became his situation: that Burns's subsequent conduct effaced the unfavourable impression created in the minds of his superiors; and that he had begun to taste the fruits of their recovered approbation and confidence, ere his career was closed by illness and death. These Commissioners of Excise were themselves subordinate officers of the government, and strictly responsible for those under them. That they did try the experiment of lenity to a certain extent, appears to be made out; that *they* could have been justified in trying it to a farther extent, is at the least doubtful. But with regard to the government of the country itself, I must say I think it is much more difficult to defend them. Mr Pitt's ministry gave Dibdin a pension of £200 a-year for writing his Sea Songs;[1] and one cannot help remembering, that when Burns did begin to excite the ardour and patriotism of his countrymen by such songs as Mr Cunningham has been alluding to, there were persons who had every opportunity of representing to the Premier the claims of a greater than Dibdin. Lenity, indulgence, to whatever length carried in such quarters as these, would have been at once safe and graceful. What the minor politicians of the day thought of Burns's poetry I know not; but Mr Pitt himself appreciated it as highly as any man. "I can think of no verse," said the great Minister, when Burns was no more—"I can

[1] By the way, Mr Fox's ministry gained no credit by diminishing Dibdin's pension during their brief sway, by one-half.

think of no verse since Shakspeare's, that has so much the appearance of coming sweetly from nature." [1]

Had Burns put forth some newspaper squibs upon Lepaux or Carnot, or a smart pamphlet "On the State of the Country," he might have been more attended to in his lifetime. It is common to say, "what is everybody's business is nobody's business;" but one may be pardoned for thinking that in such cases as this, that which the general voice of the country does admit to be everybody's business, comes in fact to be the business of those whom the nation intrusts with national concerns.

To return to Sir Walter Scott's reviewal—it seems that he has somewhat overstated the political indiscretions of which Burns was actually guilty. Let us hear the counter-statement of Mr Gray, who, as has already been mentioned, enjoyed Burns's intimacy and confidence during his residence at Dumfries.—No one who knows anything of that excellent man, will for a moment suspect him of giving any other than what he believes to be true.

"Burns (says he) was enthusiastically fond of liberty, and a lover of the popular part of our constitution; but he saw and admired the just and delicate proportions of the political fabric, and nothing could be farther from his aim than to level with the dust the venerable pile reared by the labours and the wisdom of ages. That provision of the constitution, however, by which it is made to contain a self-correcting principle, obtained no inconsiderable share of his admiration: he was, therefore, a zealous advocate of constitutional reform. The necessity of this he often supported in conversation with all the energy of an irresistible eloquence; but there is no evidence that he ever went farther. He was a member of no political club. At the time when, in certain societies, the mad cry of revolution was raised from one end of the kingdom to the other, his voice was never heard in their debates, nor did he ever support their opinions in writing, or correspond with them in any form whatever. Though limited to an income which any other man would have considered

[1] I am assured that Mr Pitt used these words at the table of the late Lord Liverpool, soon after Burns's death. How that event might come to be a natural topic at that table, will be seen in the sequel.

poverty, he refused £50 a-year offered to him for a weekly article, by the proprietors of an opposition paper; and two reasons, equally honourable to him, induced him to reject this proposal. His independent spirit spurned the idea of becoming the hireling of a party; and whatever may have been his opinion of the men and measures that then prevailed, he did not think it right to fetter the operations of that government by which he was employed."

In strong confirmation of the first part of this statement by Mr Gray,[1] we have the following extract from the poet's own private diary, never, in all human probability, designed to meet the public eye.—"Whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, I ever abjured the idea of such changes here. A constitution which, in its original principles, experience has proved to be every way fitted for our happiness, it would be insanity to abandon for an untried visionary theory." This surely is not the language of one of those who then said and sung broadly and boldly

> "Of old things all are over old;
> Of good things none are good enough;
> We'll show that we can help to frame
> A world of other stuff."

As to the delicate and intricate question of Parliamentary Reform—it is to be remembered that Mr Pitt advocated that measure at the outset of his career, and never abandoned the principle, although the events of his time were too well fitted to convince him of the inexpediency of making any farther attempts at carrying it into practice; and it is also to be considered that Burns, in his humble and remote situation, was much more likely to seize right principles, than to judge of the safety or expediency of carrying them into effect.

The statement about the newspaper, refers to Mr Perry of the *Morning Chronicle*, who, at the suggestion of Mr

[1] Mr Gray removed from the school of Dumfries to the High School of Edinburgh, in which eminent seminary he for many years laboured with distinguished success. He then became Professor of Latin in the Institution at Belfast, and is now in holy orders, and a chaplain of the East India Company in the presidency of Madras.

Miller of Dalswinton, made the proposal referred to, and received for answer a letter which may be seen in the General Correspondence of our poet, and the tenor of which is in accordance with what Mr Gray has said. Mr Perry afterwards pressed Burns to settle in London as a regular writer for his paper, and the poet declined to do so, alleging that, however small, his Excise appointment was a certainty, which, in justice to his family, he could not think of abandoning.[1]

In conclusion, Burns's abstinence from the political clubs, and affiliated societies of that disastrous period, is a circumstance, the importance of which will be appreciated by all who know anything of the machinery by which the real revolutionists of the æra designed, and endeavoured, to carry their purposes into execution.

Burns, after the Excise inquiry, took care, no doubt, to avoid similar scrapes; but he had no reluctance to meddle largely and zealously in the squabbles of county politics and contested elections; and thus, by merely espousing, on all occasions, the cause of the Whig candidates, kept up very effectually the spleen which the Tories had originally conceived on tolerably legitimate grounds. Of his political verses, written at Dumfries, hardly any specimens have as yet appeared in print; it would be easy to give many of them, but perhaps some of the persons lashed and ridiculed are still alive—their children certainly are so.

One of the most celebrated of these effusions, and one of the most quotable, was written on a desperately contested election for the Dumfries district of boroughs, between Sir James Johnstone of Westerhall, and Mr Miller, the younger, of Dalswinton; Burns, of course, maintaining the cause of his patron's family. There is much humour in

The Five Carlines.

1. There were five carlines in the south, they fell upon a scheme,
   To send a lad to Lunnun town to bring them tidings hame,
   Nor only bring them tidings hame, but do their errands there,
   And aiblins gowd and honour baith might be that laddie's share.

[1] This is stated on the authority of Major Miller.

2. There was Maggy by the banks o' Nith,[1] a dame wi' pride eneugh,
And Marjory o' the Monylochs,[2] a carline auld and teugh;
And blinkin' Bess o' Annandale,[3] that dwelt near Solwayside,
And whisky Jean that took her gill in Galloway sae wide;[4]
And black Joán frae Crichton Peel,[5] o' gipsy kith and kin,—
Five wighter carlines war na foun' the south countrie within.

3. To send a lad to Lunnun town, they met upon a day,
And mony a knight and mony a laird their errand fain wad gae,
But nae ane could their fancy please; O ne'er a ane but tway.

4. The first he was a belted knight,[6] bred o' a border clan,
And he wad gae to Lunnun town, might nae man him withstan',
And he wad do their errands weel, and meikle he wad say,
And ilka ane at Lunnun court would bid to him gude day.

5. The next came in a sodger youth,[7] and spak wi' modest grace,
And he wad gae to Lunnun town if sae their pleasure was;
He wadna hecht them courtly gifts, nor meikle speech pretend,
But he wad hecht an honest heart, wad ne'er desert a friend.

6. Now, wham to choose and wham refuse, at strife thir carlines fell,
For some had gentle folks to please, and some wad please themsell.

7. Then out spak mim-mou'd Meg o' Nith, and she spak up wi' pride,
And she wad send the sodger youth, whatever might betide;
For the auld guidman o' Lunnun[8] court she didna care a pin;
But she wad send the sodger youth to greet his eldest son.[9]

8. Then up sprang Bess o' Annandale, and a deadly aith she's taen,
That she wad vote the border knight, though she should vote her lane;
For far-aff fowls hae feathers fair, and fools o' change are fain;
But I hae tried the border knight, and I'll try him yet again.

9. Says black Joán frae Crichton Peel, a carline stoor and grim,
The auld guidman, and the young guidman, for me may sink or swim;
For fools will freat o' right or wrang, while knaves laugh them to scorn;
But the sodger's friends hae blawn the best, so he shall bear the horn.

10. Then whisky Jean spak ower her drink, Ye weel ken, kimmers a',
The auld guidman o' Lunnun court, his back's been at the wa';
And mony a friend that kiss't his cup, is now a fremit wight,
But it's ne'er be said o' whisky Jean—I'll send the border knight.

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[1] Dumfries.
[2] Lochmaben.
[3] Annan.
[4] Kirkcudbright.
[5] Sanquhar.
[6] Sir J. Johnstone.
[7] Major Miller.
[8] George III.
[9] The Prince of Wales.

11. Then slow raise Marjory o' the Lochs, and wrinkled was her brow,
Her ancient weed was russet grey, her auld Scots bluid was true;
There's some great folks set light by me—I set as light by them;
But I will sen' to Lunnun toun wham I like best at hame.

12. Sae how this weighty plea may end, nae mortal wight can tell,
God grant the King and ilka man may look weel to himsell."

The above is far the best humoured of these productions. The election to which it refers was carried in Major Miller's favour, but after a severe contest, and at a very heavy expense.

These political conflicts were not to be mingled in with impunity by the chosen laureate, wit, and orator of the district. He himself, in an unpublished piece, speaks of the terror excited by

"——Burns's venom, when
He dips in gall unmix'd his eager pen,
And pours his vengeance in the burning line;"

and represents his victims, on one of these electioneering occasions, as leading a choral shout that

"——He for his heresies in church and state,
Might richly merit Muir's and Palmer's fate."

But what rendered him more and more the object of aversion to one set of people, was sure to connect him more and more strongly with the passions,[1] and, unfortunately for himself and for us, with the pleasures of the other; and we have, among many confessions to the same purpose, the following, which I quote as the shortest, in one of the poet's letters from Dumfries to Mrs Dunlop. "I am better, but not quite free of my complaint, (he refers to the palpitation of

[1] "Lord Frederick heard of all his youthful zeal,
And felt as lords upon a canvass feel;
He read the satire, and he saw the use,
That such cool insult and such keen abuse
Might on the wavering minds of voting men produce.
I much rejoice, he cried, such worth to find
To this the world must be no longer blind.
His glory will descend from sire to son,
The Burns of English race, the happier Chatterton."
CRABBE, *in the Patron.*

heart). You must not think, as you seem to insinuate, that in my way of life, I want exercise. Of that I have enough; but occasional hard drinking is the devil to me." He knew well what he was doing whenever he mingled in such debaucheries: he had, long ere this, described himself as parting "with a slice of his constitution" every time he was guilty of such excess.

This brings us back to a subject on which it can give no one pleasure to expatiate. As has been already sufficiently intimated, the statements of Heron and Currie on this head, still more those of Mr Walker and Dr Irving, are not to be received without considerable deduction. No one of these biographers appears to have had any considerable intercourse with Burns during the latter years of his life, which they have represented in such dark colours every way; and the two survivors of their number are, I doubt not, among those who must have heard, with the highest satisfaction, the counter-statements which their narratives were the means of calling forth from men as well qualified as themselves in point of character and attainment, and much more so in point of circumstance and opportunity, to ascertain and estimate the real facts of a case, which is, at the best, a sufficiently melancholy one.

"Dr Currie," says Gilbert Burns,[1] "knowing the events of the latter years of my brother's life, only from the reports which had been propagated, and thinking it necessary, lest the candour of his work should be called in question, to state the substance of these reports, has given a very exaggerated view of the failings of my brother's life at that period—which is certainly to be regretted."

"I love Dr Currie," says the Reverend James Gray, already more than once referred to, "but I love the memory of Burns more, and no consideration shall deter me from a bold declaration of the truth. The poet of *The Cottar's Saturday Night*, who felt all the charms of the humble piety and virtue which he sung, is charged (in Dr Currie's Narrative), with vices which would reduce him to a level with the most degraded of his species.—As

[1] Letter to Mr Peterkin (Peterkin's Preface, p. 82.)

I knew him during that period of his life emphatically called his evil days, *I am enabled to speak from my own observation.* It is not my intention to extenuate his errors, because they were combined with genius; on that account, they were only the more dangerous, because the more seductive, and deserve the more severe reprehension; but I shall likewise claim that nothing may be said in malice even against him. . . . It came under my own view professionally, that he superintended the education of his children with a degree of care that I have never seen surpassed by any parent in any rank of life whatever. In the bosom of his family, he spent many a delightful hour in directing the studies of his eldest son, a boy of uncommon talents. I have frequently found him explaining to this youth, then not more than nine years of age, the English poets, from Shakspeare to Gray, or storing his mind with examples of heroic virtue, as they live in the pages of our most celebrated English historians. I would ask any person of common candour, if employments like these are consistent with *habitual drunkenness?*

"It is not denied that he sometimes mingled with society unworthy of him. He was of a social and convivial nature. He was courted by all classes of men for the fascinating powers of his conversation, but over his social scene uncontrolled passion never presided. Over the social bowl, his wit flashed for hours together, penetrating whatever it struck, like the fire from heaven; but even in the hour of thoughtless gaiety and merriment, I never knew it tainted by indecency. It was playful or caustic by turns, following an allusion through all its windings; astonishing by its rapidity, or amusing by its wild originality, and grotesque, yet natural combinations, but never, within my observation, disgusting by its grossness. In his morning hours, I never saw him like one suffering from the effects of last night's intemperance. He appeared then clear and unclouded. He was the eloquent advocate of humanity, justice, and political freedom. From his paintings, virtue appeared more lovely, and piety assumed a more celestial mien. While his keen eye was pregnant with fancy and feeling, and his voice attuned to the very passion which he wished to communicate, it would hardly

have been possible to conceive any being more interesting and delightful. I may likewise add, that to the very end of his life, reading was his favourite amusement. I have never known any man so intimately acquainted with the elegant English authors. He seemed to have the poets by heart. The prose authors he could quote either in their own words, or clothe their ideas in language more beautiful than their own. Nor was there ever any decay in any of the powers of his mind. To the last day of his life, his judgment, his memory, his imagination, were fresh and vigorous, as when he composed *The Cottar's Saturday Night*. The truth is, that Burns was seldom *intoxicated*. The drunkard soon becomes besotted, and is shunned even by the convivial. Had he been so, he could not long have continued the idol of every party. It will be freely confessed, that the hour of enjoyment was often prolonged beyond the limit marked by prudence; but what man will venture to affirm, that in situations where he was conscious of giving so much pleasure, he could at all times have listened to her voice?

"The men with whom he generally associated, were not of the lowest order. He numbered among his intimate friends, many of the most respectable inhabitants of Dumfries and the vicinity. Several of those were attached to him by ties that the hand of calumny, busy as it was, could never snap asunder. They admired the poet for his genius, and loved the man for the candour, generosity, and kindness of his nature. His early friends clung to him through good and bad report, with a zeal and fidelity that prove their disbelief of the malicious stories circulated to his disadvantage. Among them were some of the most distinguished characters in this country, and not a few females, eminent for delicacy, taste, and genius. They were proud of his friendship, and cherished him to the last moment of his existence. He was endeared to them even by his misfortunes, and they still retain for his memory that affectionate veneration which virtue alone inspires."[1]

Part of Mr Gray's letter is omitted, only because it touches on subjects, as to which Mr Findlater's statement

[1] Letter in Mr Peterkin's Preface, pp. 93-95.

must be considered as of not merely sufficient, but the very highest authority.

"My connexion with Robert Burns," says that most respectable man,[1] "commenced immediately after his admission into the Excise, and continued to the hour of his death.[2] In all that time, the superintendence of his behaviour, as an officer of the revenue, was a branch of my especial province, and it may be supposed I would not be an inattentive observer of the *general* conduct of a man and a poet, so celebrated by his countrymen. In the former capacity, he was exemplary in his attention; and was even jealous of the least imputation on his vigilance: as a proof of which, it may not be foreign to the subject to quote a part of a letter from him to myself, in a case of only *seeming* inattention.—'I know, sir, and regret deeply, that this business glances with a malign aspect on my character as an officer; but, as I am really innocent in the affair, and as the gentleman is known to be an illicit dealer, and particularly as this is the *single* instance of the least shadow of carelessness or impropriety in my conduct as an officer, I shall be peculiarly unfortunate if my character shall fall a sacrifice to the dark manœuvres of a smuggler.'—This of itself affords more than a presumption of his attention to business, as it cannot be supposed he would have written in such a style *to me*, but from the impulse of a conscious rectitude in this department of his duty. Indeed, it was not till near, the latter end of his days that there was any falling off in this respect; and this was amply accounted for in the pressure of disease and accumulating infirmities. I will further avow, that I never saw him, which was very frequently while he lived at Elliesland, and still more so, almost every day, after he removed to Dumfries, but in hours of business he was quite himself, and capable of discharging the duties of his office: nor was he ever known to drink by himself, or seen to indulge in the use of liquor in a forenoon. . . . I have seen Burns in all his various phases, in his convivial moments, in his sober moods, and in the bosom of his family; indeed, I believe I saw more of him than any

[1] Letter in Mr Peterkin's Preface, pp. 93-96.

[2] Mr Findlater watched by Burns the night before he died.

other individual had occasion to see, after he became an Excise officer, and I never beheld anything like the gross enormities with which he is now charged: That when set down in an evening with a few friends whom he liked, he was apt to prolong the social hour beyond the bounds which prudence would dictate, is unquestionable; but in his family, I will venture to say, he was never seen otherwise than attentive and affectionate to a high degree."

These statements are entitled to every consideration: they come from men altogether incapable, for any purpose, of wilfully stating that which they know to be untrue. Yet we are not, on the other hand, to throw out of view altogether the feelings of partial friendship, irritated by exaggerations such as called forth these testimonies. It is scarcely to be doubted that Dr Currie and Professor Walker took care, ere they penned their painful pages, to converse and correspond with other persons than the enemies of the deceased poet—Here, then, as in most other cases of similar controversy, the fair and equitable conclusion would seem to be, "truth lies between."

To whatever Burns's excesses amounted, they were, it is obvious, and that frequently, the subject of rebuke and remonstrance even from his own dearest friends—even from men who had no sort of objection to potations deep enough in all conscience. That such reprimands, giving shape and form to the thoughts that tortured his own bosom, should have been received at times with a strange mixture of remorse and indignation, none that have considered the nervous susceptibility and haughtiness of Burns's character can hear with surprise. But this was only when the good advice was oral.[1] No one knew

[1] A statement, of an isolated character, in the *Quarterly Review* (No. I.), has been noticed at much length, and in very intemperate language, by Mr Peterkin, in the Preface from which the above letters of Messrs Gray and Findlater are extracted. I am sure that nothing could have been further from the writer's wishes than to represent anything to Burns's disadvantage; but the reader shall judge for himself. The passage in the critique alluded to is as follows:—"Bred a peasant, and preferred to the degrading situation of a common exciseman, neither the influence of the low-minded crew around him, nor the gratification of selfish indulgence, nor that contempt of futurity which has characterised so many of his poetical brethren, ever led him to incur or endure the burden of pecuniary obligation. A very

better than he how to answer the written homilies of such persons as were most likely to take the freedom of admonishing him on points of such delicacy; nor is there anything in all his correspondence more amusing than his

intimate friend of the poet, from whom he used occasionally to borrow a small sum for a week or two, once ventured to hint that the punctuality with which the loan was always replaced at the appointed time was unnecessary and unkind. The consequence of this hint was, the interruption of their friendship for some weeks, the bard disdaining the very thought of being indebted to a human being one farthing beyond what he could discharge with the most rigid punctuality. It was a less pleasing consequence of this high spirit, that Burns was inaccessible to all friendly advice. To lay before him his errors, or to point out their consequences, was to touch a string that jarred every feeling within him. On such occasions his, like Churchill's, was

> 'The mind which starting heaves the heartfelt groan,
> And hates the form she knows to be her own.'

"It is a dreadful truth, that when racked and tortured by the well-meant and warm expostulations of an intimate friend, he started up in a paroxysm of frenzy, and drawing a sword-cane which he usually wore, made an attempt to plunge it into the body of his adviser—the next instant he was with difficulty withheld from suicide."*

In reply to this paragraph, Mr Peterkin says,† "The friend here referred to, Mr John Syme, in a written statement now before us, gives an account of this murderous-looking story, which we shall transcribe *verbatim*, that the nature of this *attempt* may be precisely known. 'In my parlour at Ryedale, one *afternoon*, Burns and I were very *gracious* and confidential. I did advise him to be temperate in all things. *I might have spoken daggers*, but I did not mean them. *He shook to the inmost fibre of his frame, and drew the sword-cane*, when I *exclaimed*, "What, wilt thou thus, and in my own house?" The poor fellow was so stung with remorse, that he dashed himself down on the floor.'—And this is gravely laid before the world at second-hand, as an *attempt* by Burns to murder a friend, and to commit suicide, from which 'he was with difficulty withheld!' So much for the manner of telling a story. The whole amount of it, by Mr Syme's account, and none else can be correct, seems to be, that being 'gracious' one afternoon (perhaps a little 'glorious' too, according to Tam o' Shanter), he, in his own house, thought fit to give Burns a lecture on temperance in all things; in the course of which he acknowledges that he '*might have spoken daggers*'—and that Burns, in a moment of irritation, perhaps of justly offended pride, merely *drew* the sword (which, like every other excise-officer, he wore *at all times* professionally in a staff), in order, as a soldier would touch his sword, to repel indignity. But by Mr Syme's own testimony, Burns only *drew* the sword from the cane: nothing is said of an *attempt* to stab;

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* *Quarterly Review*. No. I., p. 28.
† Peterkin's Preface, p. 65.

reply to a certain solemn lecture of William Nicoll, the same exemplary schoolmaster who "brewed the peck o' maut which

Rob and Allan came to pree."

. . . "O thou, wisest among the wise, meridian blaze of prudence, full moon of discretion, and chief of many counsellors! how infinitely is thy puddle-headed, rattle-headed, wrong-headed, round-headed slave indebted to thy supereminent goodness, that from the luminous path

but on the contrary, Mr Syme declares expressly that a mock-solemn *exclamation*, pretty characteristic, we suspect, of the whole affair, wound up the catastrophe of this tragical scene. Really it is a foolish piece of business to magnify such an incident into a 'dreadful truth,' illustrative of the 'untamed and plebeian' spirit of Burns. We cannot help regretting that Mr Syme should unguardedly have communicated such an anecdote to any of his friends, considering that this ebullition of momentary irritation was followed, as he himself states, by a friendship more ardent than ever betwixt him and Burns. He should have been aware, that the story, when told again and again by others, would be twisted and tortured into the scandalous form which it at last assumed in the *Quarterly Review*. The antics of a good man in the delirium of a fever, might with equal propriety be narrated in blank verse, as a proof that he was a bad man when in perfect health. A momentary gust of passion, excited by acknowledged provocation, and followed by nothing but drawing or brandishing a weapon accidentally in his hand, and an immediate and strong conviction that even this was a great error, cannot, without the most outrageous violence of construction, be tortured into an attempt to commit murder and suicide. All the artifice of language, too, is used to give a horrible impression of Burns. The sword-cane is spoken of without explanation as a thing 'which he usually wore,'—as if he had habitually carried the concealed stiletto of an assassin: The reviewer should have been much more on his guard."

The reader may probably be of opinion, upon candidly considering and comparing the statements of the reviewer and the re-reviewer:—1st, That the facts of the case are in the two stories substantially the same; 2ndly, That when the reviewer spoke of Burns's sword-cane as a weapon which he "*usually wore*," he did mean "which he wore in *his capacity of Exciseman;*" 3rdly, That Mr Syme ought never to have told the story, nor the reviewer to have published it, nor the re-reviewer to have given it additional importance by his attempt to explain into nothing what in reality amounted to little. Burns was, according to Mr Peterkin's story, "glorious" at the time when the incident occurred; and if there was no harm at all in what he did in that moment of unfortunate excitement and irritation, what means Mr Syme's own language about "the poor fellow being stung with *remorse?*" etc.

of thy own right-lined rectitude thou lookest benignly down on an erring wretch, of whom the zig-zag wanderings defy all the powers of calculation, from the simple copulation of units, up to the hidden mysteries of fluxions! May one feeble ray of that light of wisdom which darts from thy sensorium, straight as the arrow of heaven, and bright as the meteor of inspiration, may it be my portion, so that I may be less unworthy of the face and favour of that father of proverbs and master of maxims, that antipode of folly, and magnet among the sages, the wise and witty Willy Nicoll! Amen! amen! Yea, so be it!

"For me! I am a beast, a reptile, and know nothing!" etc., etc., etc.

To how many that have moralised over the life and death of Burns, might not such a *Tu quoque* be addressed!

The strongest argument in favour of those who denounce the statements of Heron, Currie, and their fellow biographers, concerning the habits of the poet, during the latter years of his career, as culpably and egregiously exaggerated, still remains to be considered. On the whole, Burns gave satisfaction by his manner of executing the duties of his station in the revenue service; he, moreover, as Mr Gray tell us (and upon this ground Mr Gray could not possibly be mistaken), took a lively interest in the education of his children, and spent more hours in their private tuition than fathers who have more leisure than his excisemanship left him, are often in the custom of so bestowing;[1] and, *lastly*, although he to all men's regret

[1] "He was a kind and attentive father, and took great delight in spending his evenings in the cultivation of the minds of his children. Their education was the grand object of his life, and he did not, like most parents, think it sufficient to send them to public schools; he was their private instructor, and even at that early age, bestowed great pains in training their minds to habits of thought and reflection, and in keeping them pure from every form of vice. This he considered as a sacred duty, and never, to the period of his last illness, relaxed in his diligence. With his eldest son, a boy of not more than nine years of age, he had read many of the favourite poets, and some of the best historians in our language; and what is more remarkable, gave him considerable aid in the study of Latin. This boy attended the Grammar School of Dumfries, and soon attracted my notice by the strength of his talent, and the ardour of his ambition. Before he had been a year at school, I thought it right to advance him a form,

executed, after his removal to Dumfriesshire, no more than one poetical piece of considerable length (*Tam o' Shanter*), his epistolary correspondence, and his songs contributed to Johnson's Museum, and to the great collection of Mr George Thomson, furnish undeniable proof that, in whatever fits of dissipation he unhappily indulged, he never could possibly have sunk into anything like that habitual grossness of manners and sottish degradation of mind, which the writers in question have not hesitated to hold up to the deepest commiseration, if not more than this, of mankind.

Of his letters written at Elliesland and Dumfries, nearly three octavo volumes have been already printed by Currie and Cromek; and it would be easy to swell the collection to double this extent. Enough, however, has been published to enable every reader to judge for himself of the character of Burns's style of epistolary composition. The severest criticism bestowed on it has been, that it is too elaborate—that, however natural the feelings, the expression is frequently more studied and artificial than belongs to that species of composition. Be this remark altogether just in point of taste, or otherwise, the fact on which it is founded, furnishes strength to our present position. The poet produced in these years a great body of elaborate prose-writing.

We have already had occasion to notice some of his contributions to Johnson's Museum. He continued to the last month of his life, to take a lively interest in that work; and besides writing for it some dozens of excellent original songs, his diligence in collecting ancient pieces hitherto unpublished, and his taste and skill in eking out fragments, were largely, and most happily exerted, all

and he began to read Cæsar, and gave me translations of that author of such beauty as I confess surprised me. On inquiry, I found that his father made him turn over his dictionary, till he was able to translate to him the passage in such a way that he could gather the author's meaning, and that it was to him he owed that polished and forcible English with which I was so greatly struck. I have mentioned this incident merely to show what minute attention he paid to this important branch of parental duty."—*Letter from the Reverend James Gray to Mr Gilbert Burns.* *See* his Edition, vol. I. Appendix, No. v.

along, for its benefit. Mr Cromek saw among Johnson's papers, no fewer than 184 of the pieces which enter into the collection, in Burns's handwriting.[1]

His connexion with the more important work of Mr Thomson commenced in September 1792; and Mr Gray justly says, that whoever considers his correspondence with the editor, and the collection itself, must be satisfied, that from that time till the commencement of his last illness, not many days ever passed over his head without the production of some new stanzas for its pages. Besides old materials, for the most part embellished with lines, if not verses of his own, and a whole body of hints, suggestions, and criticisms, Burns gave Mr Thomson about sixty original songs. It is, however, but justice to poor Heron to add, that comparatively few of this number had been made public at the time when he drew up that rash and sweeping statement, which Dr Currie adhered to in some particulars without sufficient inquiry.

The songs in this collection are by many eminent critics placed decidedly at the head of all our poet's performances: it is by none disputed that very many of them are worthy of his most felicitous inspiration. He bestowed much more care on them than on his contributions to the Museum; and the taste and feeling of the editor secured the work against any intrusions of that over-warm element which was too apt to mingle in his amatory effusions. Burns knew that he was now engaged on a work destined for the eye and ear of refinement; he laboured throughout, under the salutary feeling, "virginibus puerisque canto;" and the consequences have been happy indeed for his own fame—for the literary taste, and the national music, of Scotland; and, what is of far higher importance, the moral and national feelings of his countrymen.

In almost all these productions—certainly in all that deserve to be placed in the first rank of his compositions—Burns made use of his native dialect. He did so, too, in opposition to the advice of almost all the lettered correspondents he had—more especially of Dr Moore,

[1] *Reliques*, p. 185.

who, in his own novels, never ventured on more than a few casual specimens of Scottish colloquy — following therein the example of his illustrious predecessor Smollett; and not foreseeing that a triumph over English prejudice, which Smollett might have achieved, had he pleased to make the effort, was destined to be the prize of Burns's perseverance in obeying the dictates of native taste and judgment. Our poet received such suggestions, for the most part, in silence — not choosing to argue with others on a matter which concerned only his own feelings; but in writing to Mr Thomson, he had no occasion either to conceal or disguise his sentiments. "These English songs," says he, "gravel me to death. I have not that command of the language that I have of my native tongue;"[1] and again, "so much for namby-pamby. I may, after all, try my hand at it in Scots verse. There I am always most at home."[2]—He, besides, would have considered it as a sort of national crime to do anything that must tend to divorce the music of his native land from her peculiar idiom. The "genius loci" was never worshipped more fervently than by Burns. "I am such an enthusiast," says he, "that in the course of my several peregrinations through Scotland, I made a pilgrimage to the individual spot from which every song took its rise, *Lochaber* and the *Braes of Ballenden* excepted. So far as the locality, either from the title of the air or the tenor of the song, could be ascertained, I have paid my devotions at the particular shrine of every Scottish Muse." With such feelings, he was not likely to touch with an irreverent hand the old fabric of our national song, or to meditate a lyrical revolution for the pleasure of strangers. "There is," says he,[3] "a naïveté, a pastoral simplicity in a slight intermixture of Scots words and phraseology, which is more in unison (at least to my taste, and I will add, to every genuine Caledonian taste) with the simple pathos or rustic sprightliness of our native music, than any English verses whatever. One hint more let me give you.—Whatever Mr Pleyel does, let him not alter one *iota* of the original airs; I mean in the song department; but let our

[1] Correspondence with Mr Thomson, p. 111.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Scottish national music preserve its native features. They are, I own, frequently wild and irreducible to the more modern rules; but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect."[1]

Of the delight with which Burns laboured for Mr Thomson's Collection, his letters contain some lively descriptions. "You cannot imagine," says he, 7th April 1793, "how much this business has added to my enjoyments. What with my early attachment to ballads, your book and ballad-making are now as completely my hobby-horse as ever fortification was Uncle Toby's; so I'll e'en canter it away till I come to the limit of my race (God grant I may take the right side of the winning-post), and then, cheerfully looking back on the honest folks with whom I have been happy, I shall say or sing, 'Sae merry as we a' hae been,' and raising my last looks to the whole human race, the last words of the voice of Coila shall be 'Good-night, and joy be wi' you a'.'"[2]

"Until I am complete master of a tune in my own singing, such as it is, I can never," says Burns, "compose for it. My way is this. I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression,—then choose my theme,—compose one stanza. When that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out,—sit down now and then,—look out for objects in Nature round me that are in unison or harmony with the cogitations of my fancy, and workings of my bosom,—humming every now and then the air, with the verses I have framed. When I feel my muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals on the hind legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures, as my pen goes. Seriously, this, at home, is almost invariably my way.—What cursed egotism!"[3]

[1] It may amuse the reader to hear, that in spite of all Burns's success in the use of his native dialect, even an eminently spirited bookseller to whom the manuscript of Waverley was submitted, hesitated for some time about publishing it, on account of the Scots dialogue interwoven in the novel.

[2] Correspondence with Mr Thomson, p. 57.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

In this correspondence with Mr Thomson, and in Cromek's later publication, the reader will find a world of interesting details about the particular circumstances under which these immortal songs were severally written. They are all, or almost all, in fact, part and parcel of the poet's personal history. No man ever made his muse more completely the companion of his own individual life. A new flood of light has just been poured on the same subject, in Mr Allan Cunningham's *Collection of Scottish Songs;* unless, therefore, I were to transcribe volumes, and all popular volumes too, it is impossible to go into the details of this part of the poet's history. The reader must be contented with a few general *memoranda; e.g.*,

"Do you think that the sober gin-horse routine of existence could inspire a man with life, and love and joy —could fire him with enthusiasm, or melt him with pathos equal to the genius of your book? No, no. Whenever I want to be more than ordinary *in song*—to be in some degree equal to your divine airs—do you imagine I fast and pray for the celestial emanation? *Tout au contraire.* I have a glorious recipe, the very one that for his own use was invented by the Divinity of healing and poetry, when erst he piped to the flocks of Admetus,—I put myself on a regimen of admiring a fine woman." [1]

"I can assure you I was never more in earnest.— —Conjugal love is a passion which I deeply feel, and highly venerate; but, somehow, it does not make such a figure in poesy as that other species of the passion,—

"Where love is liberty, and nature law."

Musically speaking, the first is an instrument, of which the gamut is scanty and confined, but the tones inexpressibly sweet; while the last has powers equal to all the intellectual modulations of the human soul. Still I am a very poet in my enthusiasm of the passion. The welfare and happiness of the beloved object is the first and inviolate sentiment that pervades my soul; and—whatever pleasures I might wish for, or whatever raptures they might give me—yet, if they interfere with that first principle, it is having these pleasures at a dishonest price; and justice forbids, and generosity

[1] Correspondence with Mr Thomson, p. 174.

disdains the purchase."[1]——So says Burns in introducing to Mr Thomson's notice one of his many songs in celebration of the *Lassie wi' the lint-white locks*. "The beauty of Chloris," says, nevertheless, Allan Cunningham, "has added many charms to Scottish song; but that which has increased the reputation of the poet, has lessened that of the man. Chloris was one of those who believe in the dispensing power of beauty, and thought that love should be under no demure restraint. Burns sometimes thought in the same way himself; and it is not wonderful, therefore, that the poet should celebrate the charms of a liberal beauty who was willing to reward his strains, and who gave him many opportunities of catching inspiration from her presence." And in a note on the ballad which terminates with the delicious stanza:—

"Let others love the city, and gaudy show at summer noon,
Gie me the lonely valley, the dewy eve, and rising moon,
Fair beaming and streaming her silver light the boughs amang;
While falling, recalling, the amorous thrush concludes her sang;
There, dearest Chloris, wilt thou rove, by wimpling burn and leafy shaw,
And hear my vows o' truth and love, and say thou lo'es me best of a'?"

The same commentator adds—"Such is the glowing picture which the poet gives of youth, and health, and voluptuous beauty; but let no lady envy the poetical elevation of poor Chloris; her situation in poetry is splendid—her situation in life merits our pity—perhaps our charity."

Of all Burns's love songs, the best, in his own opinion, was that which begins,

"Yestreen I had a pint o' wine,
A place where body saw na'."

Mr Cunningham says, "if the poet thought so, I am sorry for it;" while the Reverend Hamilton Paul fully concurs in the author's own estimate of the performance. "I believe, however," says Cunningham, "*Anna wi' the gowden locks* was no imaginary person. Like the dame in the old song, *She brewed gude ale for gentlemen;* and while she served the bard with a pint of wine, allowed her customer leisure to admire her, 'as hostler wives should do.'"

[1] Correspondence with Mr Thomson, p. 191.

There is in the same collection a love song, which unites the suffrages, and ever will do so, of all men. It has furnished Byron with a motto, and Scott has said that that motto is "worth a thousand romances."

> "Had we never loved sae kindly,
> Had we never loved sae blindly,
> Never met,—or never parted,
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

The "Nancy" of this moving strain was, according to Cunningham, another fair and somewhat frail dame of Dumfriesshire.[1]

I envy no one the task of inquiring minutely in how far these traditions, for such unquestionably they are, and faithfully conveyed by Allan Cunningham, rest on the foundation of truth. They refer at worst to occasional errors. "Many insinuations," says Mr Gray, "have been made against the poet's character as a husband, but without the slightest proof; and I might pass from the charge with that neglect which it merits; but I am happy to say that I have in exculpation the direct evidence of Mrs Burns herself, who, among many amiable and respectable qualities, ranks a veneration for the memory of her departed husband, whom she never names but in terms of the profoundest respect and the deepest regret, to lament his misfortunes, or to extol his kindnesses to herself, not as the momentary overflowings of the heart in a season of penitence for offences generously forgiven, but an habitual tenderness, which ended only with his life. I place this evidence, which I am proud to bring forward on her own authority, against a thousand anonymous calumnies."[2]

Among the effusions, not amatory, which Burns contributed to Mr Thomson's Collection, the famous song of Bannockburn holds the first place. We have already seen in how lively a manner Burns's feelings were kindled when he visited that glorious field. According to tradition, the tune played when Bruce led his troops to the charge, was "Hey tuttie tattie;" and it was humming this old air as he rode by himself through Glenken in Galloway, during a terrific

[1] Cunningham's *Scottish Songs*, vol. iv. p. 178.
[2] Letter in Gilbert Burns's edition, vol. I. app. v. p. 437.

storm of wind and rain, that the poet composed his immortal lyric in its first and noblest form.[1] This is one more instance of his delight in the sterner aspects of nature.

> "Come, winter, with thine angry howl,
> And raging bend the naked tree—"

"There is hardly," says he in one of his letters, "there is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood in a cloudy winter day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion: my mind is wrapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to *Him*, who, in the pompous language of the Hebrew Bard, 'walks on the wings of the wind.'" When Burns entered a druidical circle of stones on a dreary moor, he has already told us that his first movement was "to say his prayers." His best poetry was to the last produced amidst scenes of solemn desolation.

[1] The last line of each stanza was subsequently lengthened and weakened, in order to suit the tune of Lewie Gordon, which Mr Thomson preferred to Hey tuttie tattie. I may add, however, what is well known to all lovers of Burns, and of Scottish Music, that almost immediately after having prevailed on the poet to make this alteration, Mr Thomson saw his error, and discarded both the change and the air which it was made to suit. The original air, and the original words, are now united for ever.

CHAPTER IX

"I dread thee, Fate, relentless and severe,
With all a poet's, husband's, father's fear."

We are drawing near the close of this great poet's mortal career; and I would fain hope the details of the last chapter may have prepared the humane reader to contemplate it with sentiments of sorrow, pure comparatively, and undebased with any considerable intermixture of less genial feelings.

For some years before Burns was lost to his country, it is sufficiently plain that he had been, on political grounds, an object of suspicion and distrust to a large portion of the population that had most opportunity of observing him. The mean subalterns of party had, it is very easy to suppose, delighted in decrying him on pretexts, good, bad, and indifferent, equally—to their superiors; and hence, who will not willingly believe it? the temporary and local prevalence of those extravagantly injurious reports, the essence of which Dr Currie, no doubt, thought it his duty, as a biographer, to extract and circulate.

The untimely death of one who, had he lived to anything like the usual term of human existence, might have done so much to increase his fame as a poet, and to purify and dignify his character as a man, was, it is too probable, hastened by his own intemperances and imprudences: but it seems to be extremely improbable, that, even if his manhood had been a course of saintlike virtue in all respects, the irritable and nervous bodily constitution which he inherited from his father, shaken as it was by the toils and miseries of his ill-starred youth, could have sustained, to anything like the psalmist's "allotted span," the exhausting excitements of an intensely poetical temperament. Since the first pages of this narrative were sent to the press, I have heard from an old acquaint-

ance of the bard, who often shared his bed with him at Mossgiel, that even at that early period, when intemperance assuredly had had nothing to do with the matter, those ominous symptoms of radical disorder in the digestive system, the "palpitation and suffocation" of which Gilbert speaks, were so regularly his nocturnal visitants, that it was his custom to have a great tub of cold water by his bedside, into which he usually plunged more than once in the course of the night, thereby procuring instant, though but short-lived relief. On a frame thus originally constructed, and thus early tried with most severe afflictions, external and internal, what must not have been, under any subsequent course of circumstances, the effect of that exquisite sensibility of mind, but for which the world would never have heard anything either of the sins, or the sorrows, or the poetry of Burns!

"The fates and characters of the rhyming tribe," thus writes the poet himself to Miss Chalmers in 1793, "often employ my thoughts when I am disposed to be melancholy. There is not, among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets.—In the comparative view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which between them will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions, than are the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as, arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of butterflies—in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase; lastly, fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity, and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet." In these few short sentences, as it appears to me, Burns has traced his own character far better than any one else has done it since. —But with this lot what pleasures were not mingled?—

"To you, madam," he proceeds, "I need not recount the fairy pleasures the muse bestows to counterbalance this catalogue of evils. Bewitching poetry is like bewitching woman; she has in all ages been accused of misleading mankind from the counsels of wisdom and the paths of prudence, involving them in difficulties, baiting them with poverty, branding them with infamy, and plunging them in the whirling vortex of ruin; yet, where is the man but must own that all our happiness on earth is not worthy the name—that even the holy hermit's solitary prospect of paradisiacal bliss is but the glitter of a northern sun, rising over a frozen region, compared with the many pleasures, the nameless raptures, that we owe to the lovely Queen of the heart of man!"

"What is a poet?" asks one well qualified to answer his own question. "He is a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected, more than other men, by absent things, as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions which are far indeed from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves."[1] So says one of the rare beings who have been able to sustain and enjoy, through a long term of human years, the tear and wear of sensibilities thus quickened and refined beyond what falls to the lot of the ordinary brothers of their race—feeling more than others can dream of feeling, the joys and the sorrows that come to them as individuals, and filling up all those blanks

[1] Preface to the second edition of Wordsworth's *Poems*.

which so largely interrupt the agitations of common bosoms—with the almost equally agitating sympathies of an imagination to which repose would be death. It is common to say of those who over-indulge themselves in material stimulants, that they *live fast;* what wonder that the career of the poet's thick-coming fancies should, in the immense majority of cases, be rapid too?

That Burns *lived fast*, in both senses of the phrase, we have abundant evidence from himself; and that the more earthly motion was somewhat accelerated as it approached the close, we may believe, without finding it at all necessary to mingle anger with our sorrow. "Even in his earliest poems," as Mr Wordsworth says, in a beautiful passage of his letter to Mr Gray, "through the veil of assumed habits and pretended qualities, enough of the real man appears to show that he was conscious of sufficient cause to dread his own passions, and to bewail his errors! We have rejected as false sometimes in the letter, and of necessity as false in the spirit, many of the testimonies that others have borne against him:—but, by his own hand—in words the import of which cannot be mistaken—it has been recorded that the order of his life but faintly corresponded with the clearness of his views. It is probable that he would have proved a still greater poet if, by strength of reason, he could have controlled the propensities which his sensibility engendered; but he would have been a poet of a different class: and certain it is, had that desirable restraint been early established, many peculiar beauties which enrich his verses could never have existed, and many accessary influences, which contribute greatly to their effect, would have been wanting. For instance, the momentous truth of the passage—

'One point must still be greatly dark,' etc.[1]

[1] "Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentlier sister woman—
Tho' they may gang a kennin' wrang;
To step aside is human:

One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving *why* they do it:
And just as lamely can ye mark,
How far perhaps they rue it."

could not possibly have been conveyed with such pathetic force by any poet that ever lived, speaking in his own voice; unless it were felt that, like Burns, he was a man who preached from the text of his own errors; and whose wisdom, beautiful as a flower that might have risen from seed sown from above, was in fact a scion from the root of personal suffering. Whom did the poet intend should be thought of as occupying that grave over which, after modestly setting forth the moral discernment and warm affections of its 'poor inhabitant,' it is supposed to be inscribed that

> '——— Thoughtless follies laid him low,
> And stain'd his name?'

Who but himself,—himself anticipating the too probable termination of his own course? Here is a sincere and solemn avowal—a public declaration from his own will—a confession at once devout, poetical, and human—a history in the shape of a prophecy! What more was required of the biographer than to put his seal to the writing, testifying that the foreboding had been realised, and that the record was authentic?"

In how far the "thoughtless follies" of the poet did actually hasten his end, it is needless to conjecture. They had their share, unquestionably, along with other influences which it would be inhuman to characterise as mere follies —such, for example, as that general depression of spirits, which haunted him from his youth, and, in all likelihood, sat more heavily on such a being as Burns than a man of plain common sense might guess,—or even a casual expression of discouraging tendency from the persons on whose good-will all hopes of substantial advancement in the scale of worldly promotion depended,—or that *partial* exclusion from the species of society our poet had been accustomed to adorn and delight, which, from however inadequate causes, certainly did occur during some of the latter years of his life—All such sorrows as these must have acted with twofold harmfulness upon Burns; harassing, in the first place, one of the most sensitive minds that ever filled a human bosom, and, alas! by consequence, tempting to additional excesses;—impelling one who,

under other circumstances, might have sought and found far other consolation, to seek too often for it

> "In fleeting mirth, that o'er the bottle lives,
> In the false joy its inspiration gives,
> And in associates pleased to find a friend
> With powers to lead them, gladden, and defend,
> In all those scenes where transient ease is found
> For minds whom sins oppress, and sorrows wound."[1]

The same philosophical poet tells us, that

> "—Wine is like anger, for it makes us strong;
> Blind and impatient. and it leads us wrong;
> The strength is quickly lost, we feel the error long."

But a short period was destined for the sorrows and the errors equally of Burns.

How he struggled against the tide of his misery, let the following letter speak—it was written February 25, 1794, and addressed to Mr Alexander Cunningham, an eccentric being, but generous and faithful in his friendship to Burns, and, when Burns was no more, to his family.

"Canst thou minister," says the poet, "to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tost on a sea of troubles, without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her? Canst thou give to a frame, tremblingly alive as the tortures of suspense, the stability and hardihood of the rock that braves the blast? If thou canst not do the least of these, why would'st thou disturb me in my miseries, with thy inquiries after me?

"For these two months I have not been able to lift a pen. My constitution and frame were *ab origine*, blasted with a deep incurable taint of hypochondria, which poisons my existence. Of late a number of domestic vexations, and some pecuniary share in the ruin of these ***** times —losses which, though trifling, were yet what I could ill bear, have so irritated me, that my feelings at times could only be envied by a reprobate spirit listening to the sentence that dooms it to perdition.

"Are you deep in the language of consolation? I have

[1] Crabbe's *Edward Shore*, a tale, in which the poet has obviously had Burns in his view.

exhausted in reflection every topic of comfort. *A heart at ease* would have been charmed with my sentiments and reasonings; but as to myself, I was like Judas Iscariot preaching the gospel; he might melt and mould the hearts of those around him, but his own kept its native incorrigibility.—Still there are two great pillars that bear us up, amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The ONE is composed of the different modifications of a certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of courage, fortitude, magnanimity. THE OTHER is made up of those feelings and sentiments, which, however the sceptic may deny, or the enthusiast disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human soul; those *senses of the mind*, if I may be allowed the expression, which connect us with, and link us to those awful obscure realities—an all-powerful and equally beneficent God—and a world to come, beyond death and the grave. The first gives the nerve of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the field;—the last pours the balm of comfort into the wounds which time can never cure.

"I do not remember, my dear Cunningham, that you and I ever talked on the subject of religion at all. I know some who laugh at it, as the trick of the crafty FEW, to lead the undiscerning MANY; or at most as an uncertain obscurity, which mankind can never know anything of, and with which they are fools if they give themselves much to do. Nor would I quarrel with a man for his irreligion, any more than I would for his want of a musical ear. I would regret that he was shut out from what, to me and to others, were such superlative sources of enjoyment. It is in this point of view, and for this reason, that I will deeply imbue the mind of every child of mine with religion. If my son should happen to be a man of feeling, sentiment, and taste, I shall thus add largely to his enjoyments. Let me flatter myself that this sweet little fellow who is just now running about my desk, will be a man of a melting, ardent, glowing heart; and an imagination, delighted with the painter, and rapt with the poet. Let me figure him, wandering out in a sweet evening, to inhale the balmy gales, and enjoy the growing luxuriance of the spring; himself the while in the blooming youth of life.

He looks abroad on all nature, and through nature up to nature's God. His soul, by swift, delighted degrees, is rapt above this sublunary sphere, until he can be silent no longer, and bursts out into the glorious enthusiasm of Thomson,

> 'These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
> Are but the varied God.—The rolling year
> Is full of thee;'

and so on, in all the spirit and ardour of that charming hymn.—These are no ideal pleasures; they are real delights; and I ask what of the delights among the sons of men are superior, not to say, equal to them? And they have this precious, vast addition, that conscious virtue stamps them for her own; and lays hold on them to bring herself into the presence of a witnessing, judging, and approving God."

They who have been told that Burns was ever a degraded being—who have permitted themselves to believe that his only consolations were those of "the opiate guilt applies to grief," will do well to pause over this noble letter and judge for themselves. The enemy under which he was destined to sink, had already beaten in the outworks of his constitution when these lines were penned.

The reader has already had occasion to observe, that Burns had in those closing years of his life to struggle almost continually with pecuniary difficulties, than which nothing could have been more likely to pour bitterness intolerable into the cup of his existence. His lively imagination exaggerated to itself every real evil; and this among, and perhaps above, all the rest; at least, in many of his letters we find him alluding to the probability of his being arrested for debts, which we now know to have been of very trivial amount at the worst, which we also know he himself lived to discharge to the utmost farthing, and in regard to which it is impossible to doubt that his personal friends in Dumfries would have at all times been ready to prevent the law taking its ultimate course. This last consideration, however, was one which would have given slender relief to Burns. How he shrunk with horror and loathing from the sense of pecuniary obligation, no

matter to whom, we have had abundant indications already.[1]

The question naturally arises: Burns was all this while pouring out his beautiful songs for the Museum of Johnson and the greater work of Thomson; how did he happen to derive no pecuniary advantages from this continual exertion of his genius in a form of composition so eminently calculated for popularity? Nor, indeed, is it an easy matter to answer this very obvious question. The poet himself, in a letter to Mr Carfrae, dated 1789, speaks thus: "The profits of the labours of a man of genius are, I hope, as honourable as any profits whatever; and Mr Mylne's relations are most justly entitled to that honest harvest which fate has denied himself to reap." And yet, so far from looking to Mr Johnson for any pecuniary remuneration for the very laborious part he took in his work, it appears from a passage in Cromek's *Reliques*, that the poet asked a single copy of the Museum to give to a fair friend, by way of a great favour to himself—and that that copy and his own were really all he ever received at the hands of the publisher. Of the secret history of Johnson and his book I know nothing; but the Correspondence of Burns with Mr Thomson contains curious enough details concerning his connexion with that gentleman's more important undertaking. At the outset, September, 1792, we find Mr Thomson saying, "We will esteem your poetical assistance a particular favour, besides paying any reasonable price you shall please to demand for it. Profit is quite a secondary consideration with us, and we are resolved to save neither pains nor expense on the publication." To which Burns

[1] The following extract from one of his letters to Mr Macmurdo, dated December, 1793, will speak for itself:—

"Sir,—It is said that we take the greatest liberties with our greatest friends, and I pay myself a very high compliment in the manner in which I am going to apply the remark. I have owed you money longer than ever I owed it to any man.—Here is Ker's account, and here are six guineas; and now, I don't owe a shilling to man, or woman either. But for these damned dirty, dog's-eared little pages, (Scotch bank-notes), I had done myself the honour to have waited on you long ago. Independent of the obligations your hospitality has laid me under, the consciousness of your superiority in the rank of man and gentleman of itself was fully as much as I could ever make head against; but to owe you money too, was more than I could face."

replies immediately, "As to any remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, etc., would be downright prostitution of soul. A proof of each of the songs that I compose or amend I shall receive as a favour. In the rustic phrase of the season, *Gude speed the wark*." The next time we meet with any hint as to money matters in the Correspondence is in a letter of Mr Thomson, 1st July 1793, where he says, "I cannot express how much I am obliged to you for the exquisite new songs you are sending me; but thanks, my friend, are a poor return for what you have done; as I shall be benefitted by the publication, you must suffer me to enclose a small mark of my gratitude, and to repeat it afterwards when I find it convenient. Do not return it, for, by Heaven, if you do, our correspondence is at an end." To which letter (it enclosed £5) Burns thus replies:—"I assure you, my dear sir, that you truly hurt me with your pecuniary parcel. It degrades me in my own eyes. However, to return it would savour of affectation; but as to any more traffic of that debtor and creditor kind, I swear by that honour which crowns the upright statue of Robert Burns's integrity—on the least motion of it, I will indignantly spurn the by-past transaction, and from that moment commence entire stranger to you. Burns's character for generosity of sentiment and independence of mind will, I trust, long outlive any of his wants which the cold unfeeling ore can supply: at least, I will take care that such a character he shall deserve."—In November, 1794, we find Mr Thomson writing to Burns, "Do not, I beseech you, return any books."—In May, 1795, "You really make me blush when you tell me you have not merited the drawing from me" (this was a drawing of *The Cottar's Saturday Night*, by Allan); "I do not think I can ever repay you, or sufficiently esteem and respect you, for the liberal and kind manner in which you have entered into the spirit of my undertaking, which could not have been perfected without you. So I beg you would not make a fool of me again by speaking of obligation." On February, 1796, we have Burns acknowledging a "hand-

some elegant present to Mrs B——," which was a worsted shawl. Lastly, on the 12th July of the same year (that is, little more than a week before Burns died), he writes to Mr Thomson in these terms:—"After all my boasted independence, cursed necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel . . . . of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness; but the horrors of a jail have put me half distracted.—I do not ask this gratuitously; for, upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds' worth of the neatest song genius you have seen." To which Mr Thomson replies—"Ever since I received your melancholy letter by Mrs Hyslop, I have been ruminating in what manner I could endeavour to alleviate your sufferings. Again and again I thought of a pecuniary offer; but the recollection of one of your letters on this subject, and the fear of offending your independent spirit, checked my resolution. I thank you heartily, therefore, for the frankness of your letter of the 12th, and with great pleasure enclose a draft for the very sum I proposed sending. Would I were Chancellor of the Exchequer but one day for your sake!——Pray, my good sir, is it not possible for you to muster a volume of poetry? . . . Do not shun this method of obtaining the value of your labour; remember Pope published the *Iliad* by subscription. Think of this, my dear Burns, and do not think me intrusive with my advice."

Such are the details of this matter, as recorded in the correspondence of the two individuals concerned. Some time after Burns's death, Mr Thomson was attacked on account of his behaviour to the poet, in an anonymous novel, which I have never seen, called *Nubilia;* in Professor Walker's Memoirs, which appeared in 1816, Mr Thomson took the opportunity of defending himself:[1] and

[1] "I have been attacked with much bitterness, and accused of not endeavouring to remunerate Burns for the songs which he wrote for my collection; although there is the clearest evidence of the contrary, both in the printed correspondence between the poet and me, and in the public testimony of Dr Currie. My assailant, too, without knowing anything of the matter, states, that I had enriched myself by the

Professor Walker, who enjoyed the personal friendship of Burns, and who also appears to have had the honour of Mr Thomson's intimate acquaintance, has delivered an opinion on the whole merits of the case, which must

labours of Burns; and of course, that my want of generosity was inexcusable.

"Now, the fact is, that notwithstanding the united labours of all the men of genius who have enriched my collection, I am not even yet compensated for the precious time consumed by me in poring over musty volumes, and in corresponding with every amateur and poet by whose means I expected to make any valuable additions to our national music and song;—for the exertion and money it cost me to obtain accompaniments from the greatest masters of harmony in Vienna;—and for the sums paid to engravers, printers, and others. On this subject, the testimony of Mr Preston in London, a man of unquestionable and well-known character, who has printed the music for every copy of my work, may be more satisfactory than anything I can say. In August 1809, he wrote me as follows: 'I am concerned at the very unwarrantable attack which has been made upon you by the author of *Nubilia:* nothing could be more unjust than to say you had enriched yourself by Burns's labours; for the whole concern, though it includes the labours of Haydn, has scarcely afforded a compensation for the various expenses, and for the time employed on the work. When a work obtains any celebrity, publishers are generally supposed to derive a profit ten times beyond the reality; the sale is greatly magnified, and the expenses are not in the least taken into consideration. It is truly vexatious to be so grossly and scandalously abused for conduct, the very reverse of which has been manifest through the whole transaction.'

"Were I the sordid man that the anonymous author calls me, I had a most inviting opportunity to profit much more than I did by the lyrics of our great bard. He had written above fifty songs expressly for my work; they were in my possession unpublished at his death; I had the right and the power of retaining them till I should be ready to publish them; but when I was informed that an edition of the poet's works was projected for the benefit of his family, I put them in immediate possession of the whole of his songs, as well as letters, and thus enabled Dr Currie to complete the four volumes which were sold for the family's behoof to Messrs Cadell and Davies. And I have the satisfaction of knowing, that the most zealous friends of the family, Mr Cunninghame, Mr Syme, and Dr Currie, and the poet's own brother, considered my sacrifice of the prior right of publishing the songs, as no ungrateful return for the disinterested and liberal conduct of the poet. Accordingly, Mr Gilbert Burns, in a letter to me, which alone might suffice for an answer to all the novelist's abuse, thus expresses himself: 'If ever I come to Edinburgh, I will certainly call on a person whose handsome conduct to my brother's family has secured my esteem, and confirmed me in the opinion, that musical taste and talents have a close connexion with the harmony of the

necessarily be far more satisfactory to the reader than anything which I could presume to offer in its room. "Burns," says this writer, "had all the unmanageable pride of Samuel Johnson; and, if the latter threw away, with indignation, the new shoes which had been placed at his chamber-door, secretly and collectively by his companions, —the former would have been still more ready to resent any pecuniary donation with which a single individual, after his peremptory prohibition, should avowedly have dared to insult him. He would instantly have construed such conduct into a virtual assertion that his prohibition was insincere, and his independence affected; and the more artfully the transaction had been disguised, the more rage it would have excited, as implying the same assertion, with the additional charge, that if secretly made it would not be denied. . . . The statement of Mr Thomson supersedes the necessity of any additional remarks. When the public is satisfied; when the relations of Burns are grateful; and, above all, when the delicate mind of Mr Thomson is at peace with itself in contemplating his conduct, there can be no necessity for a nameless novelist to contradict them."[1]

So far, Mr Walker:—why Burns, who was of opinion, when he wrote his letter to Mr Carfrae, that "no profits are more honourable than those of the labours of a man of genius," and whose own notions of independence had sustained no shock in the receipt of hundreds of pounds from Creech, should have spurned the suggestion of pecuniary recompense from Mr Thomson, it is no easy matter to explain: nor do I profess to understand why Mr Thomson took so little pains to argue the matter *in limine* with the poet, and convince him, that the time which he himself considered as fairly entitled to be paid for by a common bookseller, ought of right to be valued and acknowledged on similar terms by the editor and proprietor of a book containing both songs and music.

moral feelings.' Nothing is farther from my thoughts than to claim any merit for what I did. I never would have said a word on the subject, but for the harsh and groundless accusation which has been brought forward, either by ignorance or animosity, and which I have long suffered to remain unnoticed, from my great dislike to any public appearance."

[1] Life prefixed to Morrison's Burns, pp. cviii. cxii.

They order these things differently now: a living lyric poet whom none will place in a higher rank than Burns, has long, it is understood, been in the habit of receiving about as much money annually for an annual handful of songs, as was ever paid to our bard for the whole body of his writings.

Of the increasing irritability of our poet's temperament, amidst those troubles, external and internal, that preceded his last illness, his letters furnished proofs, to dwell on which could only inflict unnecessary pain. Let one example suffice.—"Sunday closes a period of our curst revenue business, and may probably keep me employed with my pen until noon. Fine employment for a poet's pen! Here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a d—— melange of fretfulness and melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild finch, caught amid the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage. Well, I am persuaded that it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied, when he foretold—'And behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper!' Pray that wisdom and bliss be more frequent visitors of R. B."

Towards the close of 1795 Burns was, as has been previously mentioned, employed as an acting Supervisor of Excise. This was apparently a step to a permanent situation of that higher and more lucrative class; and from thence, there was every reason to believe, the kind patronage of Mr Graham might elevate him yet farther. These hopes, however, were mingled and darkened with sorrow. For four months of that year his youngest child lingered through an illness of which every week promised to be the last; and she was finally cut off when the poet, who had watched her with anxious tenderness, was from home on professional business. This was a severe blow, and his own nerves, though as yet he had not taken any serious alarm about his ailments, were ill fitted to withstand it.

"There had need," he writes to Mrs Dunlop, 15th December, "there had much need be many pleasures annexed to the states of husband and father, for God knows, they have many peculiar cares. I cannot describe to you the anxious, sleepless hours these ties frequently

give me. I see a train of helpless little folks; me and my exertions all their stay; and on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang! If I am nipt off at the command of fate, even in all the vigour of manhood as I am, such things happen every day—gracious God! what would become of my little flock! 'Tis here that I envy your people of fortune.—A father on his death-bed, taking an everlasting leave of his children, has indeed woe enough; but the man of competent fortune leaves his sons and daughters independency and friends; while I—but I shall run distracted if I think any longer on the subject."

To the same lady, on the 29th of the month, he, after mentioning his supervisorship, and saying that at last his political sins seemed to be forgiven him—goes on in this ominous tone—"What a transient business is life! Very lately I was a boy; but t'other day a young man; and I already begin to feel the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast over my frame." We may trace the melancholy sequel in these extracts.

"*31st January* 1796.—I have lately drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance too, and so rapidly, as to put it out of my power to pay the last duties to her. I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock, when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever, and long the die spun doubtful; until, after many weeks of a sick-bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once indeed have been before my own door in the street.

> 'When pleasure fascinates the mental sight,
> Affliction purifies the visual ray,
> Religion hails the drear the untried night,
> That shuts, for ever shuts! life's doubtful day.'"

But a few days after this, Burns was so exceedingly imprudent as to join a festive circle at a tavern dinner, where he remained till about three in the morning. The weather was severe, and he, being much intoxicated, took no precaution in thus exposing his debilitated frame to its influence. It has been said, that he fell asleep upon the snow on his way home. It is certain, that next morning

he was sensible of an icy numbness through all his joints —that his rheumatism returned with tenfold force upon him—and that from that unhappy hour, his mind brooded ominously on the fatal issue. The course of medicine to which he submitted was violent; confinement, accustomed as he had been to much bodily exercise, preyed miserably on all his powers; he drooped visibly, and all the hopes of his friends that health would return with summer, were destined to disappointment.

"*4th June* 1796.[1]—I am in such miserable health as to be utterly incapable of showing my loyalty in any way. Rackt as I am with rheumatisms, I meet every face with a greeting like that of Balak and Balaam,—'Come curse me Jacob; and come defy me Israel.'"

"*7th July.*—I fear the voice of the Bard will soon be heard among you no more.—For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bedfast and sometimes not; but these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me—pale, emaciated, and so feeble, as occasionally to need help from my chair.—My spirits fled! fled! But I can no more on the subject."

This last letter was addressed to Mr Cunningham of Edinburgh, from the small village of Brow on the Solway Frith, about ten miles from Dumfries, to which the poet removed about the end of June; "the medical folks," as he says, "having told him that his last and only chance was bathing, country quarters, and riding." In separating himself by their advice from his family for these purposes, he carried with him a heavy burden of care. "The deuce of the matter," he writes, "is this; when an exciseman is off duty, his salary is reduced. What way, in the name of thrift, shall I maintain myself and keep a horse in country quarters on £35?" He implored his friends in Edinburgh, to make interest with the Board to grant him his full salary; "if they do not, I must lay my account with an exit truly *en poete*—if Idie not of disease, I must perish with hunger." The application was, I believe, successful; but Burns lived not to profit by the indulgence, or the justice, of his superiors.

[1] The birthday of George III.

Mrs Riddell of Glenriddel, a beautiful and very accomplished woman, to whom many of Burns's most interesting letters, in the latter years of his life, were addressed, happened to be in the neighbourhood of Brow when Burns reached his bathing quarters, and exerted herself to make him as comfortable as circumstances permitted. Having sent her carriage for his conveyance, the poet visited her on the 5th July; and she has, in a letter published by Dr Currie, thus described his appearance and conversation on that occasion :—

"I was struck with his appearance on entering the room. The stamp of death was impressed on his features. He seemed already touching the brink of eternity. His first salutation was, 'Well, madam, have you any commands for the other world?' I replied that it seemed a doubtful case which of us should be there soonest, and that I hoped he would yet live to write my epitaph. (I was then in a poor state of health.) He looked in my face with an air of great kindness, and expressed his concern at seeing me look so ill, with his accustomed sensibility. At table he ate little or nothing, and he complained of having entirely lost the tone of his stomach. We had a long and serious conversation about his present situation, and the approaching termination of all his earthly prospects. He spoke of his death without any of the ostentation of philosophy, but with firmness as well as feeling—as an event likely to happen very soon, and which gave him concern chiefly from leaving his four children so young and unprotected, and his wife in so interesting a situation—in hourly expectation of lying-in of a fifth. He mentioned, with seeming pride and satisfaction, the promising genius of his eldest son, and the flattering marks of approbation he had received from his teachers, and dwelt particularly on his hopes of that boy's future conduct and merit. His anxiety for his family seemed to hang heavy upon him, and the more perhaps from the reflection that he had not done them all the justice he was so well qualified to do. Passing from this subject, he showed great concern about the care of his literary fame, and particularly the publication of his posthumous works. He said he was well aware that his death would occasion

some noise, and that every scrap of his writing would be revived against him to the injury of his future reputation: that letters and verses written with unguarded and improper freedom, and which he earnestly wished to have buried in oblivion, would be handed about by idle vanity or malevolence, when no dread of his resentment would restrain them, or prevent the censures of shrill-tongued malice, or the insidious sarcasms of envy, from pouring forth all their venom to blast his fame. He lamented that he had written many epigrams on persons against whom he entertained no enmity, and whose characters he should be sorry to wound; and many indifferent poetical pieces, which he feared would now, with all their imperfections on their head, be thrust upon the world. On this account he deeply regretted having deferred to put his papers into a state of arrangement, as he was now quite incapable of the exertion.—The conversation was kept up with great evenness and animation on his side. I have seldom seen his mind greater or more collected. There was frequently a considerable degree of vivacity in his sallies, and they would probably have had a greater share, had not the concern and dejection I could not disguise, damped the spirit of pleasantry he seemed not unwilling to indulge.—We parted about sunset on the evening of that day (the 5th of July, 1796); the next day I saw him again, and we parted to meet no more!"

I do not know the exact date of the following:—

To Mrs Burns.—"Brow, Thursday.—My dearest Love,—I delayed writing until I could tell you what effect sea-bathing was likely to produce. It would be injustice to deny that it has eased my pains, and I think has strengthened me; but my appetite is still extremely bad. No flesh nor fish can I swallow: porridge and milk are the only things I can taste. I am very happy to hear, by Miss Jess Lewars, that you are all well. My very best and kindest compliments to her and to all the children. I will see you on Sunday.—Your affectionate husband, R. B."

There is a very affecting letter to Gilbert, dated the 7th, in which the poet says, "I am dangerously ill, and not likely to get better.—God keep my wife and children." On the 12th, he wrote the letter to Mr George Thomson,

above quoted, requesting £5; and, on the same day, he penned also the following—the last letter that he ever wrote—to his friend Mrs Dunlop.

"MADAM,—I have written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again, but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that *bourne whence no traveller returns*. Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell!!!"

I give the following anecdote in the words of Mr M'Diarmid:[1]—"Rousseau, we all know, when dying, wished to be carried into the open air, that he might obtain a parting look of the glorious orb of day. A night or two before Burns left Brow, he drank tea with Mrs Craig, widow of the minister of Ruthwell. His altered appearance excited much silent sympathy; and the evening being beautiful, and the sun shining brightly through the casement, Miss Craig (now Mrs Henry Duncan), was afraid the light might be too much for him, and rose with the view of letting down the window blinds. Burns immediately guessed what she meant; and, regarding the young lady with a look of great benignity, said, 'Thank you, my dear, for your kind attention; but, oh, let him shine; he will not shine long for me.'"

On the 18th, despairing of any benefit from the sea, our poet came back to Dumfries. Mr Allan Cunningham, who saw him arrive "visibly changed in his looks, being with difficulty able to stand upright, and reach his own door," has given a striking picture, in one of his essays, of the state of popular feeling in the town during the short space which intervened between his return and his death. —"Dumfries was like a besieged place. It was known

[1] I take the opportunity of once more acknowledging my great obligations to this gentleman, who is, I understand, connected by his marriage with the family of the poet.

he was dying, and the anxiety, not of the rich and the learned only, but of the mechanics and peasants, exceeded all belief. Wherever two or three people stood together, their talk was of Burns, and of him alone. They spoke of his history—of his person—of his works—of his family—of his fame—and of his untimely and approaching fate, with a warmth and an enthusiasm which will ever endear Dumfries to my remembrance. All that he said or was saying—the opinions of the physicians (and Maxwell was a kind and a skilful one), were eagerly caught up and reported from street to street, and from house to house."

"His good humour," Cunningham adds, "was unruffled, and his wit never forsook him. He looked to one of his fellow volunteers with a smile, as he stood by the bedside with his eyes wet, and said, 'John, don't let the awkward squad fire over me.' He repressed with a smile the hopes of his friends, and told them he had lived long enough. As his life drew near a close, the eager yet decorous solicitude of his fellow townsmen increased. It is the practice of the young men of Dumfries to meet in the streets during the hours of remission from labour, and by these means I had an opportunity of witnessing the general solicitude of all ranks and of all ages. His differences with them on some important points were forgotten and forgiven; they thought only of his genius—of the delight his compositions had diffused—and they talked of him with the same awe as of some departing spirit, whose voice was to gladden them no more."[1]

"A tremour now pervaded his frame," says Dr Currie, on the authority of the physician who attended him; "his tongue was parched; and his mind sunk into delirium, when not roused by conversation. On the second and third day the fever increased, and his strength diminished." On the fourth, July 21st, 1796, Robert Burns died.

"I went to see him laid out for the grave," says Mr Allan Cunningham; "several elder people were with me. He lay in a plain unadorned coffin, with a linen sheet drawn over his face; and on the bed, and around the body, herbs and flowers were thickly strewn, according to

[1] In the *London Magazine*, 1824. Article, "Robert Burns and Lord Byron."

the usage of the country. He was wasted somewhat by long illness; but death had not increased the swarthy hue of his face, which was uncommonly dark and deeply marked—his broad and open brow was pale and serene, and around it his sable hair lay in masses, slightly touched with grey. The room where he lay was plain and neat, and the simplicity of the poet's humble dwelling pressed the presence of death more closely on the heart than if his bier had been embellished by vanity, and covered with the blazonry of high ancestry and rank. We stood and gazed on him in silence for the space of several minutes—we went, and others succeeded us—not a whisper was heard. This was several days after his death."

On the 25th of July, the remains of the poet were removed to the Trades Hall, where they lay in state until next morning. The volunteers of Dumfries were determined to inter their illustrious comrade (as indeed he had anticipated) with military honours. The chief persons of the town and neighbourhood resolved to make part of the procession; and not a few travelled from great distances to witness the solemnity. The streets were lined by the Fencible Infantry of Angus-shire, and the Cavalry of the Cinque Ports, then quartered at Dumfries, whose commander, Lord Hawkesbury (now Earl of Liverpool), although he had always declined a personal introduction to the poet,[1] officiated as one of the chief mourners. "The multitude who accompanied Burns to the grave, went step by step," says Cunningham, "with the chief mourners. They might amount to ten or twelve thousand. Not a word was heard. . . . It was an impressive and mournful sight to see men of all ranks and persuasions and opinions mingling as brothers, and stepping side by side down the streets of Dumfries, with the remains of him who had sung of their loves and joys and domestic endearments, with a truth and a tenderness which none perhaps have since equalled. I could, indeed, have wished the military part of the procession away. The scarlet and gold—the banners displayed—the measured step, and the military array—with the sounds of martial instruments of music, had no share in increasing the

[1] So Mr Syme has informed Mr M'Diarmid.

solemnity of the burial scene; and had no connexion with the poet. I looked on it then, and I consider it now, as an idle ostentation, a piece of superfluous state which might have been spared, more especially as his neglected and traduced and insulted spirit had experienced no kindness in the body from those lofty people who are now proud of being numbered as his coevals and countrymen. . . . I found myself at the brink of the poet's grave, into which he was about to descend for ever. There was a pause among the mourners, as if loath to part with his remains; and when he was at last lowered, and the first shovelful of earth sounded on his coffin lid, I looked up and saw tears on many cheeks where tears were not usual. The volunteers justified the fears of their comrade, by three ragged and straggling volleys. The earth was heaped up, the green sod laid over him, and the multitude stood gazing on the grave for some minutes' space, and then melted silently away. The day was a fine one, the sun was almost without a cloud, and not a drop of rain fell from dawn to twilight. I notice this, not from any concurrence in the common superstition, that 'happy is the corpse which the rain rains on,' but to confute the pious fraud of a religious Magazine, which made heaven express its wrath, at the interment of a profane poet, in thunder, in lightning, and in rain."

During the funeral solemnity, Mrs Burns was seized with the pains of labour, and gave birth to a posthumous son, who quickly followed his father to the grave. Mr Cunningham describes the appearance of the family, when they at last emerged from their home of sorrow:—"A weeping widow and four helpless sons; they came into the streets in their mournings, and public sympathy was awakened afresh. I shall never forget the looks of his boys, and the compassion which they excited. The poet's life had not been without errors, and such errors, too, as a wife is slow in forgiving; but he was honoured then, and is honoured now, by the unalienable affection of his wife, and the world repays her prudence and her love by its regard and esteem."

There was much talk at the time of a subscription for a monument; but Mrs Burns beginning, ere long, to suspect that the business was to end in talk, covered the

grave at her own expense with a plain tombstone, inscribed simply with the name and age of the poet. In 1813, however, a public meeting was held at Dumfries, General Dunlop, son to Burns's friend and patroness, being in the chair; a subscription was opened, and contributions flowing in rapidly from all quarters, a costly mausoleum was at length erected on the most elevated site which the churchyard presented. Thither the remains of the poet were solemnly transferred[1] on the 5th June 1815; and the spot continues to be visited every year by many hundreds of travellers. The structure, which is perhaps more gaudy than might have been wished, bears this inscription:—

IN AETERNUM HONOREM
ROBERTI BURNS
POETARUM CALEDONIAE SUI AEVI LONGE PRINCIPIS
CUJUS CARMINA EXIMIA PATRIO SERMONE SCRIPTA
ANIMI MAGIS ARDENTIS VIQUE INGENII
QUAM ARTE VEL CULTU CONSPICUA
FACETIIS JUCUNDITATE LEPORE AFFLUENTIA
OMNIBUS LITTERARUM CULTORIBUS SATIS NOTA
CIVES SUI NECNON PLERIQUE OMNES
MUSARUM AMANTISSIMI MEMORIAMQUE VIRI
ARTE POETICA TAM PRAECLARI FOVENTES
HOC MAUSOLEUM
SUPER RELIQUIAS POETAE MORTALES
EXTRUENDUM CURAVERE
PRIMUM HUJUS AEDIFICII LAPIDEM
GULIELMUS MILLER ARMIGER
REIPUBLICAE ARCHITECTONICAE APUD SCOTOS
IN REGIONE AUSTRALI CURIO MAXIMUS PROVINCIALIS
GEORGIO TERTIO REGNANTE
GEORGIO WALLIARUM PRINCIPE
SUMMAM IMPERII PRO PATRE TENENTE
JOSEPHO GASS ARMIGERO DUMFRISIAE PRAEFECTO
THOMA F. HUNT LONDINENSI ARCHITECTO
POSUIT
NONIS JUNIIS ANNO LUCIS VMDCCCXV
SALUTIS HUMANAE MDCCCXV.[1]

[1] The original tombstone of Burns was sunk under the pavement of the mausoleum; and the grave which first received his remains is now occupied, according to her own dying request, by a daughter of Mrs Dunlop.

Immediately after the poet's death, a subscription was opened for the benefit of his family; Mr Miller of Dalswinton, Dr Maxwell, Mr Syme, Mr Cunningham, and Mr M'Murdo, becoming trustees for the application of the money. Many names from other parts of Scotland appeared in the lists, and not a few from England, especially London and Liverpool. Seven hundred pounds were in this way collected; an additional sum was forwarded from India; and the profits of Dr Currie's *Life and Edition of Burns* were also considerable. The result has been, that the sons of the poet received an excellent education, and that Mrs Burns has continued to reside, enjoying a decent independence, in the house where the poet died, situated in what is now, by the authority of the Dumfries Magistracy, called Burns' Street.

"Of the (four surviving) sons of the poet," says their uncle Gilbert in 1820, "Robert, the eldest, is placed as a clerk in the Stamp Office, London" (Mr Burns still remains in that establishment), Francis Wallace, the second, died in 1803; William Nicoll, the third, went to Madras in 1811; and James Glencairn, the youngest, to Bengal in 1812, both as cadets in the Honourable Company's service." These young gentlemen have all, it is believed, conducted themselves through life in a manner highly honourable to themselves, and to the name which they bear. One of them (James), as soon as his circumstances permitted, settled a liberal annuity on his estimable mother, which she still survives to enjoy.

Gilbert Burns, the admirable brother of the poet, survived till the 27th of April 1827. He removed from Mossgiel, shortly after the death of the poet, to a farm in Dumfriesshire, carrying with him his aged mother, who died under his roof. At a later period he became factor to the noble family of Blantyre, on their estates in East Lothian. The pecuniary succours which the poet afforded Gilbert Burns, and still more the interest excited in his behalf by the account of his personal character contained in Currie's Memoir, proved of high advantage to him. He trained up a large family, six sons and five daughters, and bestowed on all his boys what is called a classical

education. The untimely death of one of these, a young man of very promising talents, when on the eve of being admitted to holy orders, is supposed to have hastened the departure of the venerable parent. It should not be omitted, that, on the publication of his edition of his brother's works, in 1819, Gilbert repaid, with interest, the sum which the poet advanced to him in 1788. Through life, and in death, he maintained and justified the promise of his virtuous youth, and seems in all respects to have resembled his father, of whom Murdoch, long after he was no more, wrote in language honourable to his own heart: "O for a world of men of such dispositions! I have often wished, for the good of mankind, that it were as customary to honour and perpetuate the memory of those who excel in moral rectitude as it is to extol what are called heroic actions: then would the mausoleum of the friend of my youth overtop and surpass most of those we see in Westminster Abbey!"[1]

It is pleasing to trace, in all these details, the happy influence which our poet's genius has exerted over the destinies of his connexions. "In the fortunes of his family," says Mr M'Diarmid,[2] "there are few who do not feel the liveliest interest; and were a register kept of the names, and numbers, and characters, of those who from time to time visit the humble but decent abode in which Burns breathed his last, amid the deepest despondency for the fate of those who were dearer to him than life, and in which his widow is spending tranquilly the evening of her days in the enjoyment of a competency, not derived from the bounty of the public, but from the honourable exertions of her own offspring—the detail, though dry, would be pleasing to many, and would weaken, though it could not altogether efface, one of the greatest stains on the character of our country. Even as it is, his name has proved a source of patronage to those he left behind him, such as the high and the noble cannot always command. Wherever his sons wander, at home or abroad, they are regarded as the scions of a noble stock, and receive the

[1] These particulars are taken from an article which appeared, soon after Mr Burns's death, in the *Dumfries Courier*.

[2] Article in the *Dumfries Magazine*, August, 1825.

cordial greetings of hundreds who never saw their faces before, but who account it a happiness to grasp in friendly pressure the proffered hand in which circulates the blood of Burns."[1]

Sic vos non vobis.—The great poet himself, whose name is enough to ennoble his children's children, was, to the eternal disgrace of his country, suffered to live and die in penury, and, as far as such a creature could be degraded by any external circumstances, in degradation. Who can open the page of Burns, and remember without a blush, that the author of such verses, the human being whose breast glowed with such feelings, was doomed to earn mere bread for his children by casting up the stock of publicans' cellars, and riding over moors and mosses in quest of smuggling stills? The subscription for his Poems was, for the time, large and liberal, and perhaps absolves the gentry of Scotland as individuals; but that some strong movement of indignation did not spread over the whole kingdom, when it was known that Robert Burns, after being caressed and flattered by the noblest and most learned of his countrymen, was about to be established as a common gauger among the wilds of Nithsdale—and that, after he was so established, no interference from a higher quarter arrested that unworthy career:—these are circumstances which must continue to bear heavily on the memory of that generation of Scotsmen, and especially of those who then administered the public patronage of Scotland.

In defence, or at least in palliation, of this national crime, two false arguments, the one resting on facts

[1] Mr M'Diarmid, in the article above quoted, gives a touching account of the illness and death of one of the daughters of Mr James Glencairn Burns, on her voyage homewards from India. At the funeral of this poor child there was witnessed, says he, a most affecting scene. "Officers, passengers, and men, were drawn up in regular order on deck; some wore crape round the right arm, others were dressed in the deepest mourning; every head was uncovered; and as the lashing of the waves on the sides of the coffin proclaimed that the melancholy ceremony had closed, every countenance seemed saddened with grief—every eye moistened with tears. Not a few of the sailors wept outright, natives of Scotland, who, even when far away, had revived their recollections of home and youth, by listening to, or repeating the poetry of Burns."

grossly exaggerated, the other having no foundation whatever, either on knowledge or on wisdom, have been rashly set up, and arrogantly as well as ignorantly maintained. To the one, namely, that public patronage would have been wrongfully bestowed on the Poet, because the Exciseman was a political partisan, it is hoped the details embodied in this narrative have supplied a sufficient answer: had the matter been as bad as the boldest critics have ever ventured to insinuate, Sir Walter Scott's answer would still have remained—"this partisan was BURNS." The other argument is a still more heartless, as well as absurd one; to wit, that from the moral character and habits of the man, no patronage, however liberal, could have influenced and controlled his conduct, so as to work lasting and effective improvement, and lengthen his life by raising it more nearly to the elevation of his genius. This is indeed a candid and a generous method of judging! Are imprudence and intemperance, then, found to increase usually in proportion as the worldly circumstances of men are easy? Is not the very opposite of this doctrine acknowledged by almost all that have ever tried the reverses of Fortune's wheel themselves—by all that have contemplated, from an elevation not too high for sympathy, the usual course of manners, when their fellow-creatures either encounter or live in constant apprehension of

> "The thousand ills that rise where money fails,
> Debts, threats, and duns, bills, bailiffs, writs, and jails?"

To such mean miseries the latter years of Burns's life were exposed, not less than his early youth, and after what natural buoyancy of animal spirits he ever possessed, had sunk under the influence of time, which, surely bringing experience, fails seldom to bring care also and sorrow, to spirits more mercurial than his; and in what bitterness of heart he submitted to his fate, let his own burning words once more tell us. "Take," says he, writing to one who never ceased to be his friend—"take these two guineas, and place them over against that * * * * * * account of yours, which has gagged my mouth these five or six months! I can as little write good things as apologies to the man I owe money to. O, the supreme curse of mak-

ing three guineas do the business of five! Poverty! thou half sister of death, thou cousin-german of hell! Oppressed by thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes in bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. Oppressed by thee, the son of genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see, in suffering silence, his remark neglected, and his person despised, while shallow greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause. Nor is it only the family of worth that have reason to complain of thee; the children of folly and vice, though, in common with thee, the offspring of evil, smart equally under thy rod. The man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education, is condemned as a fool for his dissipation, despised and shunned as a needy wretch, when his follies, as usual, bring him to want; and when his necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country. But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune. *His* early follies and extravagance, are spirit and fire; *his* consequent wants, are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he has gained a legal commission to plunder distant provinces, or massacre peaceful nations, he returns, perhaps, laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a * * * * * * * and a lord.—Nay, worst of all, alas for helpless woman! the needy prostitute, who has shivered at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of casual prostitution, is left neglected and insulted, ridden down by the chariot wheels of the coroneted RIP, hurrying on to the guilty assignation; she, who, without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade.—Well! divines may say of it what they please, but execration is to the mind, what phlebotomy is to the body; the vital sluices of both are wonderfully relieved by their respective evacuations."[1]

In such evacuations of indignant spleen the proud heart

[1] Letter to Mr Peter Hill, bookseller, Edinburgh. General Correspondence, p. 328.

of many an unfortunate genius, besides this, has found or sought relief: and to other more dangerous indulgences, the affliction of such sensitive spirits had often, ere his time, condescended. The list is a long and a painful one; and it includes some names that can claim but a scanty share in the apology of Burns. Addison, himself, the elegant, the philosophical, the religious Addison, must be numbered with these offenders:—Jonson, Cotton, Prior, Parnell, Otway, Savage, all sinned in the same sort, and the transgressions of them all have been leniently dealt with, in comparison with those of one whose genius was probably greater than any of theirs; his appetites more fervid, his temptations more abundant, his repentance more severe. The beautiful genius of Collins sunk under similar contaminations; and those who have from dulness of head, or sourness of heart, joined in the too general clamour against Burns, may learn a lesson of candour, of mercy, and of justice, from the language in which one of the best of men, and loftiest of moralists, has commented on frailties that hurried a kindred spirit to a like untimely grave.

"In a long continuance of poverty, and long habits of dissipation," says Johnson, "it cannot be expected that any character should be exactly uniform.—That this man, wise and virtuous as he was, passed always unentangled through the snares of life, it would be prejudice and temerity to affirm: but it may be said that he at least preserved the source of action unpolluted, that his principles were never shaken, that his distinctions of right and wrong were never confounded, and that his faults had nothing of malignity or design, but proceeded from some unexpected pressure or casual temptation. Such was the fate of Collins, with whom I once delighted to converse, and whom I yet remember with tenderness."

Burns was an honest man: after all his struggles, he owed no man a shilling when he died. His heart was always warm and his hand open. "His charities," says Mr Gray, "were great beyond his means;" and I have to thank Mr Allan Cunningham for the following anecdote, for which I am sure every reader will thank him too. Mr Maxwell of Teraughty, an old, austere, sarcastic gentleman,

who cared nothing about poetry, used to say when the Excise-books of the district were produced at the meetings of the justices,—"Bring me Burns's journal: it always does me good to see it, for it shows that an honest officer may carry a kind heart about with him."

Of his religious principles, we are bound to judge by what he has told us himself in his more serious moments. He sometimes doubted with the sorrow, what in the main, and above all, in the end, he believed with the fervour of a poet. "It occasionally haunts me," says he in one of his letters,—"the dark suspicion, that immortality may be only too good news to be true;" and here, as on many points besides, how much did his method of thinking (I fear I must add of acting), resemble that of a noble poet more recently lost to us. "I am no bigot to infidelity," said Lord Byron, "and did not expect that because I doubted the immortality of man, I should be charged with denying the existence of a God. It was the comparative insignificance of ourselves and our world, when placed in comparison with the mighty whole, of which it is an atom, that first led me to imagine that our pretensions to immortality might be overrated." I dare not pretend to quote the sequel from memory, but the effect was, that Byron, like Burns, complained of "the early discipline of Scotch Calvinism," and the natural gloom of a melancholy heart, as having between them engendered "a hypochondriacal *disease*," which occasionally visited and depressed him through life. In the opposite scale, we are, in justice to Burns, to place many pages which breathe the ardour, nay the exultation of faith, and the humble sincerity of Christian hope; and as the poet himself has warned us, it well befits us "at the balance to be mute." Let us avoid, in the name of Religion herself, the fatal error of those who would rashly swell the catalogue of the enemies of religion. "A sally of levity," says once more Dr Johnson, "an indecent jest, an unreasonable objection, are sufficient, in the opinion of some men, to efface a name from the lists of Christianity, to exclude a soul from everlasting life. Such men are so watchful to censure, that they have seldom much care to look for favourable interpretations of ambiguities, or to know how soon any step of inadvertency has been expiated

by sorrow and retractation, but let fly their fulminations without mercy or prudence against slight offences or casual temerities, against crimes never committed, or immediately repented. The zealot should recollect, that he is labouring by this frequency of excommunication, against his own cause, and voluntarily adding strength to the enemies of truth. It must always be the condition of a great part of mankind, to reject and embrace tenets upon the authority of those whom they think wiser than themselves, and therefore the addition of every name to infidelity, in some degree invalidates that argument upon which the religion of multitudes is necessarily founded."[1] In conclusion, let me adopt the sentiment of that illustrious moral poet of our own time, whose generous defence of Burns will be remembered while the language lasts :—

> "Let no mean hope your souls enslave—
> Be independent, generous, brave;
> Your" *Poet* "such example gave,
> And such revere,
> But be admonish'd by his grave,
> And think and fear."[2]

It is possible, perhaps for some it may be easy, to imagine a character of a much higher cast than that of Burns, developed, too, under circumstances in many respects not unlike those of his history—the character of a man of lowly birth, and powerful genius, elevated by that philosophy which is alone pure and divine, far above all those annoyances of terrestrial spleen and passion, which mixed from the beginning with the workings of his inspiration, and in the end were able to eat deep into the great heart which they had long tormented. Such a being would have received, no question, a species of devout reverence, I mean when the grave had closed on him, to which the warmest admirers of our poet can advance no pretensions for their unfortunate favourite; but could such a being have delighted his species—could he even have instructed them like Burns? Ought we not to be thankful for every new variety of form and circumstance, in and under which

[1] Life of Sir Thomas Browne.

[2] Wordsworth's address to the sons of Burns, on visiting his grave in 1803.

the ennobling energies of true and lofty genius are found addressing themselves to the common brethren of the race? Would we have none but Miltons and Cowpers in poetry —but Brownes and Southeys in prose? Alas! if it were so, to how large a portion of the species would all the gifts of all the muses remain for ever a fountain shut up and a book sealed! Were the doctrine of intellectual excommunication to be thus expounded and enforced, how small the library that would remain to kindle the fancy, to draw out and refine the feelings, to enlighten the head by expanding the heart of man! From Aristophanes to Byron, how broad the sweep, how woeful the desolation!

In the absence of that vehement sympathy with humanity as it is, its sorrows and its joys as they are, we might have had a great man, perhaps a great poet, but we could have had no Burns. It is very noble to despise the accidents of fortune; but what moral homily concerning these, could have equalled that which Burns's poetry, considered alongside of Burns's history, and the history of his fame, presents! It is very noble to be above the allurements of pleasure; but who preaches so effectually against them, as he who sets forth in immortal verse his own intense sympathy with those that yield, and in verse and in prose, in action and in passion, in life and in death, the dangers and the miseries of yielding?

It requires a graver audacity of hypocrisy than falls to the share of most men, to declaim against Burns's sensibility to the tangible cares and toils of his earthly condition; there are more who venture on broad denunciations of his sympathy with the joys of sense and passion. To these, the great moral poet already quoted speaks in the following noble passage—and must he speak in vain? "Permit me," says he, "to remind you, that it is the privilege of poetic genius to catch, under certain restrictions of which perhaps at the time of its being exerted it is but dimly conscious, a spirit of pleasure wherever it can be found,—in the walks of nature, and in the business of men.—The poet, trusting to primary instincts, luxuriates among the felicities of love and wine, and is enraptured while he describes the fairer aspects of war; nor does he

shrink from the company of the passion of love though immoderate—from convivial pleasure though intemperate—nor from the presence of war though savage, and recognised as the hand-maid of desolation. Frequently and admirably has Burns given way to these impulses of nature; both with reference to himself, and in describing the condition of others. Who, but some impenetrable dunce or narrow-minded puritan in works of art, ever read without delight the picture which he has drawn of the convivial exaltation of the rustic adventurer, Tam o' Shanter? The poet fears not to tell the reader in the outset, that his hero was a desperate and sottish drunkard, whose excesses were frequent as his opportunities. This reprobate sits down to his cups, while the storm is roaring, and heaven and earth are in confusion;—the night is driven on by song and tumultuous noise—laughter and jest thicken as the beverage improves upon the palate—conjugal fidelity archly bends to the service of general benevolence—selfishness is not absent, but wearing the mask of social cordiality—and, while these various elements of humanity are blended into one proud and happy composition of elated spirits, the anger of the tempest without doors only heightens and sets off the enjoyment within.—I pity him who cannot perceive that, in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect.

> 'Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
> O'er a' the *ills* of life victorious.'

"What a lesson do these words convey of charitable indulgence for the vicious habits of the principal actor in this scene, and of those who resemble him!—Men who to the rigidly virtuous are objects almost of loathing, and whom therefore they cannot serve! The poet, penetrating the unsightly and disgusting surfaces of things, has unveiled with exquisite skill the finer ties of imagination and feeling, that often bind these beings to practices productive of much unhappiness to themselves, and to those whom it is their duty to cherish;—and, as far as he puts the reader into possession of this intelligent sympathy, he qualifies him for exercising a salutary in-

fluence over the minds of those who are thus deplorably deceived."[1]

That some men in every age will comfort themselves in the practice of certain vices, by reference to particular passages both in the history and in the poetry of Burns, there is all reason to fear; but surely the general influence of both is calculated, and has been found, to produce far different effects. The universal popularity which his writings have all along enjoyed among one of the most virtuous of nations, is of itself, as it would seem, a decisive circumstance. Search Scotland over, from the Pentland to the Solway, and there is not a cottage-hut so poor and wretched as to be without its Bible; and hardly one that, on the same shelf, and next to it, does not possess a Burns. Have the people degenerated since their adoption of this new manual? Has their attachment to the Book of Books declined? Are their hearts less firmly bound, than were their fathers', to the old faith and the old virtues? I believe, he that knows the most of the country will be the readiest to answer all these questions, as every lover of genius and virtue would desire to hear them answered.

On one point there can be no controversy; the poetry of Burns has had most powerful influence in reviving and strengthening the national feelings of his countrymen. Amidst penury and labour, his youth fed on the old minstrelsy and traditional glories of his nation, and his genius divined, that what he felt so deeply must belong to a spirit that might lie smothered around him, but could not be extinguished. The political circumstances of Scotland were, and had been, such as to starve the flame of patriotism; the popular literature had striven, and not in vain, to make itself English; and, above all, a new and a cold system of speculative philosophy had begun to spread widely among us. A peasant appeared, and set himself to check the creeping pestilence of this indifference. Whatever genius has since then been devoted to the illustration of the national manners, and sustaining thereby of the national feelings of the people, there can be no doubt that Burns will ever be remembered as the

[1] Wordsworth's Letter to Gray, p. 24.

founder, and, alas! in his own person as the martyr, of this reformation.

That what is nowadays called, by solitary eminence, the *wealth* of the nation, had been on the increase ever since our incorporation with a greater and wealthier state —nay, that the laws had been improving, and, above all, the administration of the laws, it would be mere bigotry to dispute. It may also be conceded easily, that the national mind had been rapidly clearing itself of many injurious prejudices—that the people, as a people, had been gradually and surely advancing in knowledge and wisdom, as well as in wealth and security. But all this good had not been accomplished without rude work. If the improvement were valuable, it had been purchased dearly. "The spring fire," Allan Cunningham says beautifully somewhere, "which destroys the furze, makes an end also of the nests of a thousand song-birds; and he who goes a-trouting with lime leaves little of life in the stream." We were getting fast ashamed of many precious and beautiful things, only for that they were old and our own.

It has already been remarked, how even Smollett, who began with a national tragedy, and one of the noblest of national lyrics, never dared to make use of the dialect of his own country; and how Moore, another most enthusiastic Scotsman, followed in this respect, as in others, the example of Smollett, and over and over again counselled Burns to do the like. But a still more striking sign of the times is to be found in the style adopted by both of these novelists, especially the great master of the art, in their representations of the manners and characters of their own countrymen. In *Humphry Clinker*, the last and best of Smollett's tales, there are some traits of a better kind—but, taking his works as a whole, the impression it conveys is certainly a painful, a disgusting one. The Scotsmen of these authors are the Jockeys and Archies of farce—

"Time out of mind the Southrons' mirthmakers"—

the best of them grotesque combinations of simplicity and hypocrisy, pride and meanness. When such men, high-spirited Scottish gentlemen, possessed of learning and

talents, and, one of them at least, of splendid genius, felt, or fancied, the necessity of making such submissions to the prejudices of the dominant nation, and did so without exciting a murmur among their own countrymen, we may form some notion of the boldness of Burns's experiment; and on contrasting the state of things then with what is before us now, it will cost no effort to appreciate the nature and consequences of the victory in which our poet led the way, by achievements never in their kind to be surpassed.[1] "Burns," says Mr Campbell, "has given the elixir vitæ to his dialect:"[2]—he gave it to more than his dialect.

The moral influence of his genius has not been confined to his own countrymen. "The range of the *pastoral*," said Johnson, "is narrow. Poetry cannot dwell upon the minuter distinctions by which one species differs from another, without departing from that simplicity of grandeur which *fills the imagination;* nor dissect the latent qualities of things, without losing its *general power of gratifying every mind by recalling its own conceptions.* Not only the images of rural life, but the occasions on which they can be properly applied, are few and general. The state of a man confined to the employments and pleasures of the country, is so little diversified, and exposed to so few of those accidents which produce perplexities, terrors, and surprises, in more complicated transactions, that he can be shown but seldom in such circumstances as attract curiosity. His ambition is without

[1] "He was," says a writer, in whose language a brother poet will be recognised—"he was in many respects born at a happy time; happy for a man of genius like him, but fatal and hopeless to the more common mind. A whole world of life lay before Burns, whose inmost recesses, and darkest nooks, and sunniest eminences, he had familiarly trodden from his childhood. All that world he felt could be made his own. No conqueror had overrun its fertile provinces, and it was for him to be crowned supreme over all the

'Lyric singers of that high-soul'd land.'

The crown that he has won can never be removed from his head. Much is yet left for other poets, even among that life where his spirit delighted to work; but he has built monuments on all the high places, and they who follow can only hope to leave behind them some far humbler memorials."—*Blackwood's Magazine*, Feb. 1817.

[2] *Specimens of the British Poets*, vol. vii. p. 240.

policy, and his love without intrigue. He has no complaints to make of his rival, but that he is richer than himself; nor any disasters to lament, but a cruel mistress or a bad harvest."[1] Such were the notions of the great arbiter of taste, whose dicta formed the creed of the British world, at the time when Burns made his appearance to overturn all such dogmata at a single blow; to convince the loftiest of the noble, and the daintiest of the learned, that wherever human nature is at work, the eye of a poet may discover rich elements of his art—that over Christian Europe, at all events, the purity of sentiment and the fervour of passion may be found combined with sagacity of intellect, wit, shrewdness, humour, whatever elevates and whatever delights the mind, not more easily amidst the most "complicated transactions" of the most polished societies, than

"In huts where poor men lie."

Burns did not place himself only within the estimation and admiration of those whom the world called his superiors—a solitary tree emerging into light and air, and leaving the parent underwood as low and as dark as before. He, as well as any man,

"Knew his own worth, and reverenced the lyre;"[2]

but he ever announced himself as a peasant, the representative of his class, the painter of their manners, inspired by the same influences which ruled their bosoms; and whosoever sympathised with the verse of Burns, had his soul opened for the moment to the whole family of man. If, in too many instances, the matter has stopped there—the blame is not with the poet, but with the mad and unconquerable pride and coldness of the worldly heart—"man's inhumanity to man." If, in spite of Burns, and all his successors, the boundary lines of society are observed with increasing strictness among us—

[1] *Rambler*, No. 36.

[2] Perhaps some readers will smile to hear, that Burns very often wrote his name on his books thus—"Robert Burns, Poet;" and that Allan Cunningham remembers a favourite *collie* at Elliesland having the same inscription on his collar.

if the various orders of men still, day by day, feel the cord of sympathy relaxing, let us lament over symptoms of a disease in the body politic, which, if it goes on, must find sooner or later a fatal ending: but let us not undervalue the antidote which has all along been checking this strong poison. Who can doubt that at this moment thousands of "the first-born of Egypt" look upon the smoke of a cottager's chimney with feelings which would never have been developed within their being, had there been no Burns?

Such, it can hardly be disputed, has been and is the general influence of this poet's genius; and the effect has been accomplished, not in spite of, but by means of the most exact contradiction of, every one of the principles laid down by Dr Johnson in a passage already cited; and, indeed, assumed throughout the whole body of that great author's critical disquisitions. Whatever Burns has done, he has done by his exquisite power of entering into the characters and feelings of individuals, as Heron has well expressed it, "by the effusion of particular, not general sentiments, and in the picturing out of particular imagery."

Dr Currie says, that "if *fiction* be the soul of poetry, as some assert, Burns can have small pretensions to the name of poet." The success of Burns, the influence of his verse, would alone be enough to overturn all the systems of a thousand definers; but the Doctor has obviously taken *fiction* in far too limited a sense. There are indeed but few of Burns's pieces in which he is found creating beings and circumstances, both alike alien from his own person and experience, and then by the power of imagination, divining and expressing what forms life and passion would assume with, and under these—But there are some; there is quite enough to satisfy every reader of *Hallowe'en*, the *Jolly Beggars*, and *Tam o' Shanter* (to say nothing of various particular songs, such as *Bruce's Address*, *Macpherson's Lament*, etc.), that Burns, if he pleased, might have been as largely and as successfully an inventor in this way, as he is in another walk, perhaps not so inferior to this as many people may have accustomed themselves to believe; in the art, namely, of recombining and new-

combining, varying, embellishing, and fixing and transmitting the elements of a most picturesque experience, and most vivid feelings.

Lord Byron, in his letter on Pope, treats with high and just contempt the laborious trifling which has been expended on distinguishing by air-drawn lines and technical slang-words, the elements and materials of poetical exertion; and, among other things, expresses his scorn of the attempts that have been made to class Burns among minor poets, merely because he has put forth few large pieces, and still fewer of what is called the purely imaginative character. Fight who will about words and forms, "Burns's rank," says he, "is in the first class of his art;" and, I believe, the world at large are nowadays well prepared to prefer a line from such a pen as Byron's on any such subject as this, to the most luculent dissertation that ever perplexed the brains of writer and of reader. *Sentio, ergo sum*, says the metaphysician; the critic may safely parody the saying, and assert that that is poetry of the highest order, which exerts influence of the most powerful order on the hearts and minds of mankind.

Burns has been appreciated duly, and he has had the fortune to be praised eloquently, by almost every poet who has come after him. To accumulate all that has been said of him, even by men like himself, of the first order, would fill a volume—and a noble monument, no question, that volume would be—the noblest, except what he has left us in his own immortal verses, which—were some dross removed, and the rest arranged in a chronological order—would I believe form, to the intelligent, a more perfect and vivid history of his life than will ever be composed out of all the materials in the world besides.

"The impression of his genius," says Campbell, "is deep and universal; and viewing him merely as a poet, there is scarcely another regret connected with his name, than that his productions, with all their merit, fall short of the talents which he possessed. That he never attempted any great work of fiction, may be partly traced to the cast of his genius, and partly to his circumstances, and defective education. His poetical temperament was that of fitful transports, rather than steady inspiration.

Whatever he might have written, was likely to have been fraught with passion. There is always enough of *interest* in life to cherish the feelings of genius; but it requires knowledge to enlarge and enrich the imagination. Of that knowledge, which unrolls the diversities of human manners, adventures, and characters, to a poet's study, he could have no great share; although he stamped the little treasure which he possessed in the mintage of sovereign genius."[1]

"Notwithstanding," says Sir Walter Scott, "the spirit of many of his lyrics, and the exquisite sweetness and simplicity of others, we cannot but deeply regret that so much of his time and talents were frittered away in compiling and composing for musical collections. There is sufficient evidence, that even the genius of Burns could not support him in the monotonous task of writing love verses, on heaving bosoms and sparkling eyes, and twisting them into such rhythmical forms as might suit the capricious evolutions of Scotch reels and strathspeys. Besides, this constant waste of his power and fancy in small and insignificant compositions, must necessarily have had no little effect in deterring him from undertaking any grave or important task. Let no one suppose that we undervalue the songs of Burns. When his soul was intent on suiting a favourite air to words humorous or tender, as the subject demanded, no poet of our tongue ever displayed higher skill in marrying melody to immortal verse. But the writing of a series of songs for large musical collections, degenerated into a slavish labour which no talents could support, led to negligence, and, above all, diverted the poet from his grand plan of dramatic composition. To produce a work of this kind, neither, perhaps, a regular tragedy nor comedy, but something partaking of the nature of both, seems to have been long the cherished wish of Burns. He had even fixed on the subject, which was an adventure in low life, said to have happened to Robert Bruce, while wandering in danger and disguise, after being defeated by the English. The Scottish dialect would have rendered such a piece totally unfit for the stage; but those who recollect the masculine and lofty

[1] *Specimens*, vol. vii. p. 241.

tone of martial spirit which glows in the poem of Bannockburn, will sigh to think what the character of the gallant Bruce might have proved under the hand of Burns. It would undoubtedly have wanted that tinge of chivalrous feeling which the manners of the age, no less than the disposition of the monarch, demanded; but this deficiency would have been more than supplied by a bard who could have drawn from his own perceptions the unbending energy of a hero sustaining the desertion of friends, the persecution of enemies, and the utmost malice of disastrous fortune. The scene, too, being partly laid in humble life, admitted that display of broad humour and exquisite pathos, with which he could, interchangeably and at pleasure, adorn his cottage views. Nor was the assemblage of familiar sentiments incompatible in Burns, with those of the most exalted dignity. In the inimitable tale of *Tam o' Shanter*, he has left us sufficient evidence of his abilities to combine the ludicrous with the awful, and even the horrible. No poet, with the exception of Shakspeare, ever possessed the power of exciting the most varied and discordant emotions with such rapid transitions. His humorous description of death in the poem on *Dr Hornbook* borders on the terrific, and the witches' dance in the kirk of Alloway is at once ludicrous and horrible. Deeply must we then regret those avocations which diverted a fancy so varied and so vigorous, joined with language and expression suited to all its changes, from leaving a more substantial monument to his own fame, and to the honour of his country."[1]

The cantata of the *Jolly Beggars*, which was not printed at all until some time after the poet's death, and has not been included in the editions of his works until within these few years, cannot be considered as it deserves, without strongly heightening our regret that Burns never lived to execute his meditated drama. That extraordinary sketch, coupled with his later lyrics in a higher vein, is enough to show that in him we had a master capable of placing the musical drama on a level with the loftiest of our classical forms. *Beggar's Bush*, and *Beggar's Opera*, sink into tameness in the comparison; and indeed, without profanity to the name of Shakspeare, it may be said, that out of

[1] *Quarterly Review*, No. 1. p. 33.

such materials, even his genius could hardly have constructed a piece in which imagination could have more splendidly predominated over the outward shows of things —in which the sympathy-awakening power of poetry could have been displayed more triumphantly under circumstances of the greatest difficulty.—That remarkable performance, by the way, was an early production of the Mauchline period;[1] I know nothing but the *Tam o' Shanter* that is calculated to convey so high an impression of what Burns might have done.

As to Burns's want of education and knowledge, Mr Campbell may not have considered, but he must admit, that whatever Burns's opportunities had been at the time when he produced his first poems, such a man as he was not likely to be a hard reader (which he certainly was), and a constant observer of men and manners, in a much wider circle of society than almost any other great poet has ever moved in, from three-and-twenty to eight-and-thirty, without having thoroughly removed any pretext for auguring unfavourably on that score, of what he might have been expected to produce in the more elaborate departments of his art, had his life been spared to the usual limits of humanity. In another way, however, I cannot help suspecting that Burns's enlarged knowledge, both of men and books, produced an unfavourable effect, rather than otherwise, on the exertions, such as they were, of his later years. His generous spirit was open to the impression of every kind of excellence; his lively imagination, bending its own vigour to whatever it touched, made him admire even what other people try to read in vain; and after travelling, as he did, over the general surface of our literature, he appears to have been somewhat startled at the consideration of what he himself had, in comparative ignorance, adventured, and to have been more intimidated than encouraged by the retrospect. In most of the new departments in which he made some trial of his strength (such, for example, as the moral epistle in Pope's vein, the *heroic* satire, etc.), he appears to have soon lost heart, and

[1] So John Richmond of Mauchline informed Chambers—*see* the *Picture of Scotland*, article "Mauchline," for some entertaining particulars of the scene that suggested the poem.

paused. There is indeed one magnificent exception in *Tam o' Shanter*—a piece which no one can understand without believing, that had Burns pursued that walk, and poured out his stores of traditionary lore, embellished with his extraordinary powers of description of all kinds, we might have had from his hand a series of national tales, uniting the quaint simplicity, sly humour, and irresistible pathos of another Chaucer, with the strong and graceful versification, and masculine wit and sense of another Dryden.

This was a sort of feeling that must have in time subsided.—But let us not waste words in regretting what might have been, where so much is. Burns, short and painful as were his years, has left behind him a volume in which there is inspiration for every fancy, and music for every mood; which lives, and will live in strength and vigour—"to soothe," as a generous lover of genius has said—"the sorrows of how many a lover, to inflame the patriotism of how many a soldier, to fan the fires of how many a genius, to disperse the gloom of solitude, appease the agonies of pain, encourage virtue, and show vice its ugliness;"[1]—a volume, in which, centuries hence, as now, wherever a Scotsman may wander, he will find the dearest consolation of his exile. Already has

> "——— Glory without end
> Scattered the clouds away; and on that name attend
> The tears and praises of all time."[2]

[1] *See* the *Censura Literaria* of Sir Egerton Brydges, vol. ii. p. 55.
[2] *Childe Harold*, Canto iv. 36.

APPENDIX

SELECT LETTERS AND JOURNALS OF BURNS

1. To Miss Ellison Begbie

Lochlea (1780-1).

I verily believe, my dear E., that the pure genuine feelings of love are as rare in the world as the pure genuine principles of virtue and piety. This I hope will account for the uncommon style of all my letters to you. By uncommon, I mean their being written in such a serious manner, which, to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister. I don't know how it is, my dear; for though, except your company, there is nothing on earth gives me so much pleasure as writing to you, yet it never gives me those giddy raptures so much talked of among lovers. I have often thought that if a well-grounded affection be not really a part of virtue, 'tis something extremely akin to it. Whenever the thought of my E. warms my heart, every feeling of humanity, every principle of generosity kindles in my breast. It extinguishes every dirty spark of malice and envy which are but too apt to infest me. I grasp every creature in the arms of universal benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of the happy, and sympathise with the miseries of the unfortunate. I assure you, my dear, I often look up to the Divine Disposer of events with an eye of gratitude for the blessing which I hope He intends to bestow on me in bestowing you. I sincerely wish that He may bless my endeavours to make your life as comfortable and happy as possible, both in sweetening the rougher parts of my natural temper, and

bettering the unkindly circumstances of my fortune. This, my dear, is a passion, at least in my view, worthy of a man, and I will add worthy of a Christian. The sordid earth-worm may profess love to a woman's person, whilst in reality his affection is centered in her pocket: and the slavish drudge may go a-wooing as he goes to the horse-market to choose one who is stout and firm, and as we may say of an old horse, one who will be a good drudge and draw kindly. I disdain their dirty, puny ideas. I would be heartily out of humour with myself, if I thought I were capable of having so poor a notion of the sex, which were designed to crown the pleasures of society. Poor devils! I don't envy them their happiness who have such notions. For my part I propose quite other pleasures with my dear partner.—R. B.

2. To the Same

Lochlea (1780-1).

My dear E.,—I do not remember in the course of your acquaintance and mine, ever to have heard your opinion on the ordinary way of falling in love amongst people of our station in life: I do not mean the persons who proceed in the way of bargain, but those whose affection is really placed on the person.

Though I be, as you know very well, but a very awkward lover myself, yet as I have some opportunities of observing the conduct of others who are much better skilled in the affair of courtship than I am, I often think it is owing to lucky chance more than to good management, that there are not more unhappy marriages than usually are.

It is natural for a young fellow to like the acquaintance of the females, and customary for him to keep them company when occasion serves: some one of them is more agreeable to him than the rest there is something, he knows not what, pleases him, he knows not how, in her company. This I take to be what is called love with the greater part of us; and I must own, my dear E., it is a hard game such a one as you have to play when you meet with such a lover. You cannot refuse but he is sincere,

and yet though you use him ever so favourably, perhaps in a few months, or at farthest in a year or two, the same unaccountable fancy may make him as distractedly fond of another, whilst you are quite forgot. I am aware that perhaps the next time I have the pleasure of seeing you, you may bid me take my own lesson home, and tell me that the passion I have professed for you is perhaps one of those transient flashes I have been describing; but I hope, my dear E., you will do me the justice to believe me, when I assure you that the love I have for you is founded on the sacred principles of virtue and honour, and by consequence so long as you continue possessed of those amiable qualities which first inspired my passion for you, so long must I continue to love you. Believe me, my dear, it is love like this alone which can render the marriage state happy. People may talk of flames and raptures as long as they please, and a warm fancy, with a flow of youthful spirits, may make them feel something like what they describe; but sure I am the nobler faculties of the mind, with kindred feelings of the heart, can only be the foundation of friendship, and it has always been my opinion that the married life was only friendship in a more exalted degree. If you will be so good as to grant my wishes and it shall please Providence to spare us to the latest period of life, I can look forward and see that even then, though bent down with wrinkled age; even then, when all other worldly circumstances will be indifferent to me, I will regard my E. with the tenderest affection, and for this plain reason, because she is still possessed of these noble qualities, improved to a much higher degree, which first inspired my affection for her.

> "O happy state! when souls each other draw,
> When love is liberty, and nature law."

I know were I to speak in such a style to many a girl, who thinks herself possessed of no small share of sense, she would think it ridiculous; but the language of the heart is, my dear E., the only courtship I shall ever use to you.

When I look over what I have written, I am sensible that it is vastly different from the ordinary style of court-

ship, but I shall make no apology—I know your good nature will excuse what your good sense may see amiss.—R. B.

3. To the Same

Lochlea (1780-1).

I have often thought it a peculiarly unlucky circumstance in love, that though in every other situation in life telling the truth is not only the safest, but actually by far the easiest way of proceeding, a lover is never under greater difficulty in acting, or more puzzled for expression, than when his passion is sincere, and his intentions are honourable. I do not think that it is very difficult for a person of ordinary capacity to talk of love and fondness which are not felt, and to make vows of constancy and fidelity which are never intended to be performed, if he be villain enough to practise such detestable conduct: but to a man whose heart glows with the principles of integrity and truth, and who sincerely loves a woman of amiable person, uncommon refinement of sentiment, and purity of manners—to such an one, in such circumstances, I can assure you, my dear, from my own feelings at this present moment, courtship is a task indeed. There is such a number of foreboding fears, and distrustful anxieties crowd into my mind when I am in your company, or when I sit down to write to you, that what to speak or what to write I am altogether at a loss.

There is one rule which I have hitherto practised, and which I shall invariably keep with you, and that is, honestly to tell you the plain truth. There is something so mean and unmanly in the arts of dissimulation and falsehood, that I am surprised they can be acted by any one in so noble, so generous a passion, as virtuous love. No, my dear E., I shall never endeavour to gain your favour by such detestable practices. If you will be so good and so generous as to admit me for your partner, your companion, your bosom friend through life, there is nothing on this side of eternity shall give me greater transport; but I shall never think of purchasing your hand by any arts unworthy of a man, and I will add, of a Christian. There is one

thing, my dear, which I earnestly request of you, and it is this: that you would soon either put an end to my hopes by a peremptory refusal, or cure me of my fears by a generous consent.

It would oblige me much if you would send me a line or two when convenient. I shall only add further that, if a behaviour regulated (though perhaps but very imperfectly) by the rules of honour and virtue, if a heart devoted to love and esteem you, and an earnest endeavour to promote your happiness; if these are qualities you would wish in a friend, in a husband, I hope you shall ever find them in your real friend and sincere lover,—R. B.

4. To the Same

Lochlea (1780-1).

I ought, in good manners, to have acknowledged the receipt of your letter before this time, but my heart was so shocked with the contents of it, that I can scarcely yet collect my thoughts so as to write you on the subject. I will not attempt to describe what I felt on receiving your letter. I read it over and over, again and again, and though it was in the politest language of refusal, still it was peremptory; "you were sorry you could not make me a return, but you wish me," what, without you, I never can obtain, "you wish me all kind of happiness." It would be weak and unmanly to say that without you I never can be happy; but sure I am, that sharing life with you would have given it a relish, that, wanting you, I can never taste.

Your uncommon personal advantages, and your superior good sense, do not so much strike me: these, possibly, may be met with in a few instances in others; but that amiable goodness, that tender feminine softness, that endearing sweetness of disposition, with all the charming offspring of a warm feeling heart—these I never again expect to meet with in such a degree in this world. All these charming qualities, heightened by an education much beyond anything I have ever met in any woman I ever dared to approach, have made an impression on my heart that I do not think the world can ever efface. My imagination has fondly flattered myself with a wish—I dare not say it ever

reached a hope—that possibly I might one day call you mine. I had formed the most delightful images, and my fancy fondly brooded over them; but now I am wretched for the loss of what I really had no right to expect. I must now think no more of you as a mistress: still I presume to ask to be admitted as a friend. As such I wish to be allowed to wait on you, and as I expect to remove in a few days a little further off, and you, I suppose, will soon leave this place, I wish to see or hear from you soon: and if an expression should perhaps escape me rather too warm for friendship, I hope you will pardon it in, my dear Miss —— (pardon me the dear expression for once), . . . R.B.

5. To his Father

Irvine, *27th December* 1781.

Honoured Sir,—I have purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New Year's Day; but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder, and on the whole I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind that I dare neither review past events, nor look forward into futurity; for the least anxiety or perturbation in my breast produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment, is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, and uneasinesses, and disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it, and if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

> "The soul uneasy, and confined at home,
> Rests and expatiates in a life to come."

It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations, than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer. As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed, I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which I hope have been remembered ere it is yet too late. Present my dutiful respects to my mother, and my compliments to Mr and Mrs Muir; and with wishing you a merry New Year's Day, I shall conclude. I am, honoured Sir,—Your dutiful Son, ROBERT BURNESS.

P.S.—My meal is nearly out, but I am going to borrow till I get more.

6. To Mr John Murdoch, Schoolmaster, Staples Inn Buildings, London.

[John Murdoch, before his removal to London, kept the school of Lochlea, where the sons of William Burnes were for a time his pupils.]

LOCHLEA, 15*th January* 1783.

DEAR SIR,—As I have an opportunity of sending you a letter without putting you to that expense which any production of mine would but ill repay, I embrace it with pleasure, to tell you that I have not forgotten, nor ever will forget, the many obligations I lie under to your kindness and friendship.

I do not doubt, Sir, but you will wish to know what has been the result of all the pains of an indulgent father, and a masterly teacher; and I wish I could gratify your curiosity with such a recital as you will be pleased with;

but that is what I am afraid will not be the case. I have, indeed, kept pretty clear of vicious habits; and, in this respect, I hope, my conduct will not disgrace the education I have gotten; but, as a man of the world, I am most miserably deficient. One would have thought that, bred as I have been, under a father who has figured pretty well as *un homme des affaires*, I might have been what the world calls a pushing, active fellow; but to tell you the truth, Sir, there is hardly anything more my reverse. I seem to be one sent into the world, to see and observe; and I very easily compound with the knave who tricks me of my money, if there be anything original about him, which shows me human nature in a different light from anything I have seen before. In short, the joy of my heart is to "study men, their manners, and their ways;" and for this darling subject, I cheerfully sacrifice every other consideration. I am quite indolent about those great concerns that set the bustling, busy sons of care agog; and if I have to answer for the present hour, I am very easy with regard to anything further. Even the last shift of the unfortunate and the wretched does not much terrify me: I know that even then my talent for what country folks call "a sensible crack," when once it is sanctified by a hoary head, would procure me so much esteem, that even then—I would learn to be happy. However, I am under no apprehensions about that; for though indolent, yet so far as an extremely delicate constitution permits, I am not lazy; and in many things, especially in tavern matters, I am a strict economist: not, indeed, for the sake of the money; but one of the principal parts in my composition is a kind of pride of stomach; and I scorn to fear the face of any man living: above everything, I abhor as hell, the idea of sneaking in a corner to avoid a dun—possibly some pitiful, sordid wretch, who in my heart I despise and detest. 'Tis this, and this alone, that endears economy to me. In the matter of books, indeed, I am very profuse. My favourite authors are of the sentimental kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his *Elegies;* Thomson; *Man of Feeling*—a book I prize next to the Bible; *Man of the World;* Sterne, especially his *Sentimental Journey;* Macpherson's *Ossian*, etc.: these are the glorious

models after which I endeavour to form my conduct, and 'tis incongruous, 'tis absurd to suppose that the man whose mind glows with sentiments lighted up at the sacred flame—the man whose heart distends with benevolence to all the human race—he "who can soar above this little scene of things"—can he descend to mind the paltry concerns about which the terræfilial race fret, and fume, and vex themselves! Oh how the glorious triumph swells my heart! I forget that I am a poor, insignificant devil, unnoticed and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets, when I happen to be in them, reading a page or two of mankind, and "catching the manners living as they rise," whilst the men of business jostle me on every side, as an idle incumbrance in their way . . . .

Dear Sir, yours—R. B.

7. Commonplace Book

(1783-5.)

Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poetry, etc., by Robert Burness; a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it; but was, however, a man of some sense, a great deal of honesty, and unbounded good-will to every creature, rational and irrational.—As he was but little indebted to scholastic education, and bred at a plough-tail, his performances must be strongly tinctured with his unpolished, rustic way of life; but as I believe they are really his own, it may be some entertainment to a curious observer of human nature to see how a ploughman thinks and feels under the pressure of love, ambition, anxiety, grief, with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the modes and manners of life, operate pretty much alike, I believe, on all the species.

"There are numbers in the world who do not want sense to make a figure, so much as an opinion of their own abilities to put them upon recording their observations, and allowing them the same importance which they do to those that appear in print."—Shenstone.

"Pleasing, when youth is long expired, to trace
The forms our pencil or our pen designed!
Such was our youthful air, and shape, and face,
Such the soft image of our youthful mind."—*Ibid.*

April 1783.

Notwithstanding all that has been said against love, respecting the folly and weakness it leads a young inexperienced mind into; still I think it in a great measure deserves the highest encomiums that have been passed upon it. If anything on earth deserves the name of rapture or transport, it is the feelings of green eighteen in the company of the mistress of his heart, when she repays him with an equal return of affection.

August.

There is certainly some connexion between love and music and poetry; and, therefore, I have always thought it a fine touch of nature, that passage in a modern love-composition :—

> "As towards her cot he jogged along,
> Her name was frequent in his song."

For my own part I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I got once heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were in a manner the spontaneous language of my heart. The following composition was the first of my performances, and done at an early period of my life, when my heart glowed with honest warm simplicity; unacquainted and uncorrupted with the ways of a wicked world. The performance is, indeed, very puerile and silly; but I am always pleased with it, as it recalls to my mind those happy days when my heart was yet honest, and my tongue was sincere. The subject of it was a young girl who really deserved all the praises I have bestowed on her. I not only had this opinion of her then —but I actually think so still, now that the spell is long since broken, and the charm at an end :—

> "O, once I lov'd a bonie lass,
> Ay, and I love her still,
> And whilst that virtue warms my breast
> I'll love my handsome Nell.
> Fal lal de ral, etc.
>
> As bonie lasses I hae seen,
> And monie full as braw,
> But for a modest gracefu' mien
> The like I never saw.

A bonie lass, I will confess,
Is pleasant to the ee,
But without some better qualities
She's no a lass for me.

But Nelly's looks are blithe and sweet,
And what is best of a',
Her reputation is complete,
And fair without a flaw.

She dresses aye sae clean and neat,
Both decent and genteel:
And then there's something in her gait
Gars onie dress look weel.

A gaudy dress and gentle air
May slightly touch the heart,
But it's innocence and modesty
That polishes the dart.

'Tis this in Nelly pleases me,
'Tis this enchants my soul!
For absolutely in my breast
She reigns without control.
Fal lal de ral, etc."

Lest my works should be thought below criticism; or meet with a critic who, perhaps, will not look on them with so candid and favourable an eye; I am determined to criticise them myself.

The first distich of the first stanza is quite too much in the flimsy strain of our ordinary street ballads; and, on the other hand, the second distich is too much in the other extreme. The expression is a little awkward, and the sentiment too serious. Stanza the second I am well pleased with; and I think it conveys a fine idea of that amiable part of the sex—the agreeables: or what in our Scotch dialect we call a sweet sonsy lass. The third stanza has a little of the flimsy turn in it; and the third line has rather too serious a cast. The fourth stanza is a very indifferent one; the first line is, indeed, all in the strain of the second stanza, but the rest is mostly expletive. The thoughts in the fifth stanza come finely up to my favourite idea—a sweet sonsy lass: the last line, however, halts a little. The same sentiments are kept up with equal spirit and tenderness in the sixth stanza; but the second and fourth lines ending with short syllables hurt the whole.

The seventh stanza has several minute faults; but I remember I composed it in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it but my heart melts, my blood sallies at the remembrance.

September.

I entirely agree with that judicious philosopher, Mr Smith, in his excellent *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that remorse is the most painful sentiment that can embitter the human bosom. Any ordinary pitch of fortitude may bear up tolerably well under those calamities in the procurement of which we ourselves have had no hand; but when our own follies or crimes have made us miserable and wretched, to bear up with manly firmness, and at the same time have a proper penitential sense of our misconduct, is a glorious effort of self-command.

"Of all the numerous ills that hurt our peace,
That press the soul, or wring the mind with anguish,
Beyond comparison the worst are those
That to our folly or our guilt we owe.
In every other circumstance the mind
Has this to say—'It was no deed of mine;'
But when to all the evil of misfortune
This sting is added—'Blame thy foolish self;'
Or worser far, the pangs of keen remorse;
The torturing, gnawing, consciousness of guilt—
Of guilt, perhaps, where we've involved others;
The young, the innocent, who fondly lov'd us,
Nay, more, that very love their cause of ruin!
O burning hell! in all thy store of torments
There's not a keener lash!
Lives there a man so firm, who, while his heart
Feels all the bitter horrors of his crime,
Can reason down its agonising throbs;
And, after proper purpose of amendment,
Can firmly force his jarring thoughts to peace?
O happy! happy! enviable man!
O glorious magnanimity of soul!"

March, 1784.

I have often observed, in the course of my experience of human life, that every man, even the worst, has something good about him; though very often nothing else than a happy temperament of constitution inclining him to this or that virtue. For this reason, no man can say in what degree

any other person, besides himself, can be, with strict justice, called wicked. Let any of the strictest character for regularity of conduct among us, examine impartially how many vices he has never been guilty of, not from any care or vigilance, but for want of opportunity, or some accidental circumstance intervening; how many of the weaknesses of mankind he has escaped, because he was out of the line of such temptation; and, what often, if not always, weighs more than all the rest, how much he is indebted to the world's good opinion, because the world does not know all: I say, any man who can thus think, will scan the failings, nay, the faults and crimes, of mankind around him, with a brother's eye.

I have often courted the acquaintance of that part of mankind commonly known by the ordinary phrase of blackguards, sometimes farther than was consistent with the safety of my character; those who, by thoughtless prodigality or headstrong passions, have been driven to ruin. Though disgraced by follies, nay, sometimes stained with guilt, I have yet found among them, in not a few instances, some of the noblest virtues, magnanimity, generosity, disinterested friendship, and even modesty.

April.

As I am what the men of the world, if they knew such a man, would call a whimsical mortal, I have various sources of pleasure and enjoyment, which are in a manner peculiar to myself, or some here and there such other out-of-the-way person. Such is the peculiar pleasure I take in the season of winter, more than the rest of the year. This, I believe, may be partly owing to my misfortunes giving my mind a melancholy cast: but there is something even in the

> "Mighty tempest, and the hoary waste,
> Abrupt and deep, stretch'd o'er the buried earth,"—

which raises the mind to a serious sublimity, favourable to everything great and noble. There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a

wood, or high plantation, in a cloudy winter day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion: my mind is wrapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him, who, in the pompous language of the Hebrew bard, "walks on the wings of the wind." In one of these seasons, just after a train of misfortunes, I composed the following:—

"The wintry west extends his blast,
And hail and rain does blaw;
Or, the stormy north sends driving forth,
The blinding sleet and snaw:
While, tumbling brown, the burn comes down,
And roars frae bank to brae:
And bird and beast in covert rest,
And pass the heartless day.

'The sweeping blast, the sky o'ercast,'
The joyless winter-day,
Let others fear, to me more dear
Than all the pride of May:
The tempest's howl, it soothes my soul,
My griefs it seems to join;
The leafless trees my fancy please,
Their fate resembles mine!

Thou Pow'r Supreme, whose mighty scheme
These woes of mine fulfil,
Here, firm, I rest, they must be best,
Because they are Thy will!
Then all I want, (Oh! do Thou grant
This one request of mine!)
Since to enjoy Thou dost deny,
Assist me to resign."

Shenstone finely observes, that love verses, writ without any real passion, are the most nauseous of all conceits; and I have often thought that no man can be a proper critic of love-composition, except he himself, in one or more instances, have been a warm votary of this passion. As I have been all along a miserable dupe to love, and have been led into a thousand weaknesses and follies by it, for that reason I put the more confidence in my critical skill, in distinguishing foppery and conceit from real passion and nature. Whether the following song will stand the test, I will not pretend to say, because it is my own;

only I can say it was, at the time, genuine from the heart:—

"Behind yon hills where Stinchar flows,
'Mang moors an' mosses many, O,
The wintry sun the day has clos'd,
And I'll awa' to Nanie, O.

The westlin wind blaws loud an' shrill;
The night's baith mirk and rainy, O:
But I'll get my plaid, an' out I'll steal,
An' owre the hill to Nanie, O.

My Nanie's charming, sweet, an' young:
Nae artfu' wiles to win ye, O:
May ill befa' the flattering tongue
That wad beguile my Nanie, O.

Her face is fair, her heart is true,
As spotless as she's bonie, O:
The op'ning gowan, wat wi' dew,
Nae purer is than Nanie, O.

A country lad is my degree,
An' few there be that ken me, O;
But what care I how few they be,
I'm welcome aye to Nanie, O.

My riches a's my penny-fee,
An' I maun guide it cannie, O;
But warl's gear ne'er troubles me,
My thoughts are a', my Nanie, O.

Our auld Guidman delights to view
His sheep an' kye thrive bonie, O;
But I'm as blythe that hauds his pleugh,
An' has nae care but Nanie, O.

Come weel, come woe, I care na by,
I'll tak what Heav'n will send me, O;
Nae ither care in life have I,
But live, an' love my Nanie, O."

March 1784.

There was a certain period of my life that my spirit was broke by repeated losses and disasters, which threatened, and indeed effected, the utter ruin of my fortune. My body, too, was attacked by that most dreadful distemper, a hypochondria, or confirmed melancholy. In this wretched state, the recollection of which makes me yet shudder, I

hung my harp on the willow-trees, except in some lucid intervals, in one of which I composed the following :—

"O Thou great Being ! what Thou art
Surpasses me to know :
Yet sure I am, that known to Thee
Are all Thy works below.

Thy creature here before Thee stands,
All wretched and distrest ;
Yet sure those ills that wring my soul
Obey Thy high behest.

Sure, Thou, Almighty, canst not act
From cruelty or wrath !
O, free my weary eyes from tears,
Or close them fast in death !

But if I must afflicted be,
To suit some wise design ;
Then, man my soul with firm resolves
To bear and not repine ! "

April.

The following song is a wild rhapsody, miserably deficient in versification ; but as the sentiments are the genuine feelings of my heart, for that reason I have a particular pleasure in conning it over :—

"My Father was a Farmer upon the Carrick border, O
And carefully he bred me in decency and order, O
He bade me act a manly part, though I had ne'er a farthing, O
For without an honest manly heart, no man was worth regarding, O.

Then out into the world my course I did determine, O
Tho' to be rich was not my wish, yet to be great was charming, O
My talents they were not the worst ; nor yet my education, O
Resolv'd was I, at least to try, to mend my situation, O.

In many a way, and vain essay, I courted fortune's favour ; O
Some cause unseen still stept between, to frustrate each endeavour, O
Sometimes by foes I was o'erpower'd ; sometimes by friends forsaken ; O
And when my hope was at the top, I still was worst mistaken, O.

Then sore harass'd, and tir'd at last, with fortune's vain delusion ; O
I dropt my schemes, like idle dreams, and came to this conclusion ; O
The past was bad, and the future hid ; its good or ill untried ; O
But the present hour was in my pow'r, and so I would enjoy it, O.

No help, nor hope, nor view had I; nor person to befriend me; O
So I must toil, and sweat and broil, and labour to sustain me, O
To plough and sow, to reap and mow, my father bred me early; O
For one, he said, to labour bred, was a match for fortune fairly, O.

Thus all obscure, unknown, and poor, thro' life I'm doom'd to wander, O
Till down my weary bones I lay in everlasting slumber; O
No view nor care, but shun whate'er might breed me pain or sorrow; O
I live to-day as well's I may, regardless of to-morrow, O.

But cheerful still, I am as well as a monarch in a palace, O
Tho' fortune's frown still hunts me down, with all her wonted malice; O
I make indeed my daily bread, but ne'er can make it farther; O
But as daily bread is all I need, I do not much regard her, O.

When sometimes by my labour I earn a little money, O
Some unforeseen misfortune comes generally upon me; O
Mischance, mistake, or by neglect, or my good-natur'd folly; O
But come what will, I've sworn it still, I'll ne'er be melancholy, O.

All you who follow wealth and power, with unremitting ardour, O
The more in this you look for bliss, you leave your view the farther; O
Had you the wealth Potosi boasts, or nations to adore you, O
A cheerful honest-hearted clown I will prefer before you, O."

April.

I think the whole species of young men may be naturally enough divided into two grand classes, which I shall call the *grave* and the *merry;* though, by the by, these terms do not with propriety enough express my ideas. The grave I shall cast into the usual division of those who are goaded on by the love of money, and those whose darling wish is to make a figure in the world. The merry are the men of pleasure of all denominations; the jovial lads, who have too much fire and spirit to have any settled rule of action; but, without much deliberation, follow the strong impulses of nature: the thoughtless, the careless, the indolent—in particular *he* who, with a happy sweetness of natural temper, and a cheerful vacancy of thought, steals through life—generally, indeed, in poverty and obscurity; but poverty and obscurity are only evils to him who can sit gravely down and make a repining comparison between his own situation and that of others; and lastly, to grace the quorum, such are, generally, those whose heads are

capable of all the towerings of genius, and whose hearts are warmed with all the delicacy of feeling.

August.

The foregoing was to have been an elaborate dissertation on the various species of men; but as I cannot please myself in the arrangement of my ideas, I must wait till farther experience and nicer observation throw more light on the subject.—In the meantime I shall set down the following fragment, which, as it is the genuine language of my heart, will enable anybody to determine which of the classes I belong to:—

"There's nought but care on every han',
In every hour that passes, O;
What signifies the life o' man,
An' 'twerna for the lasses, O?

Green grow the rashes, O!
Green grow the rashes, O!
The sweetest hours that e'er I spent,
Were spent amang the lasses, O!

The warly race may riches chase,
An' riches still may fly them, O;
An' though at last they catch them fast,
Their hearts can ne'er enjoy them, O.
Green grow, etc.

But gie me a cannie hour at e'en,
My arms about my dearie, O;
An' warly cares, an' warly men,
May a' gae tapsalteerie, O!
Green grow, etc.

For you sae douse, ye sneer at this,
Ye're nought but senseless asses, O:
The wisest man the warl' e'er saw,
He dearly loved the lasses, O.
Green grow, etc.

Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears
Her noblest work she classes, O:
Her 'prentice han' she tried on man,
An' then she made the lasses, O.
Green grow, etc."

As the grand end of human life is to cultivate an intercourse with that BEING to whom we owe life, with every

njoyment that renders life delightful; and to maintain an ntegritive conduct towards our fellow-creatures; that so, y forming piety and virtue into habit, we may be fit nembers for that society of the pious and the good which eason and revelation teach us to expect beyond the grave, do not see that the turn of mind and pursuits of such an ne as the above verses describe—one who spends the ours and thoughts which the vocations of the day can pare with Ossian, Shakspeare, Thomson, Shenstone, terne, etc.; or, as the maggot takes him, a gun, a fiddle, r a song to make or mend; and at all times some heart's- ear bonnie lass in view—I say I do not see that the turn f mind and pursuits of such an one are in the least more nimical to the sacred interests of piety and virtue, than ne even lawful bustling and straining after the world's iches and honours: and I do not see but he may gain eaven as well—which, by the by, is no mean considera- ion—who steals through the vale of life, amusing himself ith every little flower that fortune throws in his way, as e who, straining straight forward, and perhaps bespatter- ng all about him, gains some of life's little eminences, here, after all, he can only see and be seen a little more onspicuously than what, in the pride of his heart, he is pt to term the poor, indolent devil he has left behind im.

August.

A Prayer, when fainting fits, and other alarming symp- oms of a pleurisy or some other dangerous disorder, which ndeed still threatens me, first put nature on the alarm:—

"O Thou unknown, Almighty Cause
Of all my hope and fear!
In whose dread presence, ere an hour,
Perhaps I must appear!

If I have wander'd in those paths
Of life I ought to shun;
As something, loudly in my breast,
Remonstrates I have done;

Thou know'st that Thou hast form'd me
With passions wild and strong;
And list'ning to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong.

Where human weakness has come short,
Or frailty stept aside,
Do thou, All-Good! for such Thou art,
In shades of darkness hide.

Where with intention I have err'd,
No other plea I have,
But, Thou art good; and Goodness still
Delighteth to forgive."

August.

Misgivings in the hour of despondency and prospect of death:—

"Why am I loth to leave this earthly scene?
Have I so found it full of pleasing charms?
Some drops of joy with draughts of ill between:
Some gleams of sunshine 'mid renewing storms;
Is it departing pangs my soul alarms?
Or Death's unlovely, dreary, dark abode?
For guilt, for guilt, my terrors are in arms;
I tremble to approach an angry God,
And justly smart beneath His sin-avenging rod.

Fain would I say, 'Forgive my foul offence!'
Fain promise never more to disobey;
But should my Author health again dispense,
Again I might desert fair virtue's way:
Again in folly's path might go astray;
Again exalt the brute and sink the man;
Then how should I for Heav'nly mercy pray,
Who act so counter Heav'nly mercy's plan?
Who sin so oft have mourn'd, yet to temptation ran?

O Thou great Governor of all below!
If I may dare a lifted eye to Thee,
Thy nod can make the tempest cease to blow,
Or still the tumult of the raging sea:
With that controuling pow'r assist ev'n me,
Those headlong furious passions to confine
For all unfit I feel my pow'rs to be,
To rule their torrent in th' allowed line;
O, aid me with Thy help, Omnipotence Divine!"

EGOTISMS FROM MY OWN SENSATIONS

May [1784?].

I don't well know what is the reason of it, but somehow or other, though I am, when I have a mind, pretty

generally beloved, yet I never could get the art of commanding respect: I imagine it is owing to my being deficient in what Sterne calls "that understrapping virtue of discretion." I am so apt to a *lapsus linguæ*, that I sometimes think the character of a certain great man I have read of somewhere is very much *à-propos* to myself—that he was a compound of great talents and great folly. N.B.—To try if I can discover the causes of this wretched infirmity, and, if possible, to mend it.

"Tho' cruel fate should bid us part,
As far's the pole and line;
Her dear idea round my heart
Should tenderly entwine.

Tho' mountains frown and deserts howl,
And oceans roar between;
Yet, dearer than my deathless soul,
I still would love my Jean."

. . . . . .

"One night as I did wander,
When corn begins to shoot,
I sat me down to ponder,
Upon an auld tree root:

Auld Ayr ran by before me,
And bicker'd to the seas;
A cushat crooded o'er me
That echoed thro' the braes."

. . . . . .

"There was a lad was born in Kyle,
But what'n a day o' what'n a style
I doubt it's hardly worth the while
To be sae nice wi' Robin.

Robin was a rovin' Boy,
Rantin' rovin', rantin' rovin';
Robin was a rovin' Boy,
Rantin' rovin' Robin.

Our monarch's hindmost year but ane
Was five-and-twenty days begun,
'Twas then a blast o' Janwar win'
Blew hansel in on Robin.

The gossip keekit in his loof,
Quo' scho wha lives will see the proof,
This waly boy will be nae coof,
I think we'll ca' him Robin.

He'll hae misfortunes great and sma',
But ay a heart aboon them a';
He'll be a credit till us a',
We'll a' be proud o' Robin.

But sure as three times three mak nine,
I see by ilka score and line,
This chap will dearly like our kin',
So leeze me on thee, Robin.

Guid faith, quo' scho, I doubt you, Sir,
Ye gar the lasses lie aspar,
But twenty fauts ye may hae waur,
So blessings on thee, Robin!

Robin was a rovin' Boy,
Rantin' rovin', rantin' rovin';
Robin was a rovin' Boy,
Rantin' rovin' Robin."

ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF ROBERT RUISSEAUX

"Now Robin lies in his last lair,
He'll gabble rhyme, nor sing nae mair,
Cauld poverty, wi' hungry stare,
Nae mair shall fear him:
Nor anxious fear, nor cankert care,
E'er mair come near him.

To tell the truth, they seldom fash't him,
Except the moment that they crush't him;
For sune as chance or fate had husht 'em,
Tho' e'er sae short,
Then wi' a rhyme or sang he lasht 'em,
And thought it sport.

Tho' he was bred to kintra wark,
And counted was baith wight and stark,
Yet that was never Robin's mark
To mak a man;
But tell him, he was learn'd and clark,
Ye roos'd him than!"

August.

However I am pleased with the works of our Scotch poets, particularly the excellent Ramsay, and the still more

excellent Fergusson, yet I am hurt to see other places of Scotland, their towns, rivers, woods, haughs, etc., immortalised in such celebrated performances, while my dear native country, the ancient bailieries of Carrick, Kyle, and Cunningham, famous both in ancient and modern times for a gallant and warlike race of inhabitants; a country where civil, and particularly religious liberty have ever found their first support, and their last asylum; a country, the birthplace of many famous philosophers, soldiers, and statesmen, and the scene of many important events recorded in Scottish history, particularly a great many of the actions of the glorious Wallace, the saviour of his country; yet, we never have had one Scotch poet of any eminence, to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes on Ayr, and the heathy mountainous source and winding sweep of Doon, emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed, etc. This is a complaint I would gladly remedy, but, alas! I am far unequal to the task, both in native genius and education. Obscure I am, and obscure I must be, though no young poet, nor young soldier's heart, ever beat more fondly for fame than mine:—

"And if there is no other scene of being
Where my insatiate wish may have its fill,
This something at my heart that heaves for room,
My best, my dearest part, was made in vain."

August.

A Fragment—

"When first I came to Stewart Kyle
My mind it was na steady,
Where'er I gaed, where'er I rade,
A mistress still I had aye:
But when I came roun' by Mauchline town,
Not dreadin' onie body,
My heart was caught before I thought,
And by a Mauchline lady."

. . . . . .

September.

There is a great irregularity in the old Scotch songs, a redundancy of syllables with respect to that exactness of accent and measure that the English poetry requires, but

which glides in, most melodiously, with the respective tunes to which they are set. For instance, the fine old song of "The Mill, Mill, O," to give it a plain, prosaic reading, it halts prodigiously out of measure; on the other hand, the song set to the same tune in Bremner's collection of Scotch songs, which begins, "To Fanny fair could I impart," etc. it is most exact measure: and yet, let them both be sung before a real critic, one above the biases of prejudices, but a thorough judge of nature,—how flat and spiritless will the last appear, how trite, and lamely methodical, compared with the wild-warbling cadence, the heart-moving melody of the first! This is particularly the case with all those airs which end with a hypermetrical syllable. There is a degree of wild irregularity in many of the compositions and fragments which are daily sung to them by my compeers, the common people—a certain happy arrangement of old Scotch syllables, and yet, very frequently, nothing, not even like rhyme, or sameness of jingle, at the ends of the lines. This has made me sometimes imagine that perhaps it might be possible for a Scotch poet, with a nice judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our most favourite airs, particularly that class of them mentioned above, independent of rhyme altogether.

There is a noble sublimity, a heart-melting tenderness, in some of our ancient ballads, which show them to be the work of a masterly hand: and it has often given me many a heartache to reflect that such glorious old bards—bards who very probably owed all their talents to native genius, yet have described the exploits of heroes, the pangs of disappointment, and the meltings of love, with such fine strokes of nature—that their very names (oh how mortifying to a bard's vanity!) are now "buried among the wreck of things which were."

O ye illustrious names unknown! who could feel so strongly and describe so well: the last, the meanest of the Muses' train—one who, though far inferior to your flights, yet eyes your path, and with trembling wing would sometimes soar after you—a poor rustic bard unknown, pays this sympathetic pang to your memory! Some of you tell

us, with all the charms of verse, that you have been unfortunate in the world—unfortunate in love: he, too, has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and, worse than all, the loss of the woman he adored. Like you, all his consolation was his Muse: she taught him in rustic measures to complain. Happy could he have done it with your strength of imagination and flow of verse! May the turf lie lightly on your bones! and may you now enjoy that solace and rest which this world rarely gives to the heart tuned to all the feelings of poesy and love!

September.

"Altho' my bed were in yon muir,
Amang the heather, in my plaidie,
Yet happy, happy would I be,
Had I my dear Montgomery's Peggy.

When o'er the hill beat sturly storms,
And winter nights were dark and rainy;
I'd seek some dell, and in my arms
I'd shelter dear Montgomery's Peggy.

Were I a baron proud and high,
And horse and servants waiting ready,
Then a' 'twad gie o' joy to me,
The sharin't wi' Montgomery's Peggy."

There is a fragment in imitation of an old Scotch song, well known among the country ingle sides. I cannot tell the name, neither of the song nor the tune, but they are in fine unison with one another. By the way, these old Scottish airs are so nobly sentimental, that when one would compose to them, to "south the tune," as our Scotch phrase is, over and over, is the readiest way to catch the inspiration, and raise the bard into that glorious enthusiasm so strongly characteristic of our old Scotch poetry. I shall here set down one verse of the piece mentioned above, both to mark the song and tune I mean, and likewise as a debt I owe to the author, as the repeating of that verse has lighted up my flame a thousand times:—

"When clouds in skies do come together—
To hide the brightness of the weather,
There will surely be some pleasant weather
When a' their storms are past and gone.[1]

[1] Alluding to the misfortunes he feelingly laments before this verse.

Though fickle Fortune has deceived me,
She promised fair and perform'd but ill;
Of mistress, friends, and wealth bereav'd me,—
Yet I bear a heart shall support me still.

I'll act with prudence as far as I'm able
But if success I must never find,
Then come misfortune, I bid thee welcome,
I'll meet thee with an undaunted mind."

The above was an extempore, under the pressure of a heavy train of misfortunes, which, indeed, threatened to undo me altogether. It was just at the close of that dreadful period mentioned already; and though the weather has brightened up a little with me, yet there has always been since a tempest brewing round me in the grim sky of futurity, which I pretty plainly see will some time or other, perhaps ere long, overwhelm me, and drive me into some doleful dell, to pine in solitary, squalid wretchedness.—However, as I hope my poor country Muse, who, all rustic, awkward, and unpolished as she is, has more charms for me than any other of the pleasures of life beside—as I hope she will not then desert me, I may even then learn to be, if not happy, at least easy, and south a sang to soothe my misery.

'Twas at the same time I set about composing an air in the old Scotch style. I am not musical scholar enough to prick down my tune properly, so it can never see the light, and perhaps 'tis no great matter; but the following were the verses I composed to suit it:—

"O raging fortune's withering blast
Has laid my leaf full low! O
O raging fortune's withering blast
Has laid my leaf full low! O.

My stem was fair, my bud was green,
My blossom sweet did blow; O
The dew fell fresh, the sun rose mild,
And made my branches grow; O.

But luckless fortune's northern storms
Laid a' my blossoms low, O
But luckless fortune's northern storms
Laid a' my blossoms low, O."

The tune consisted of three parts, so that the above verses just went through the whole air.

October 1785.

If ever any young man, in the vestibule of the world, chance to throw his eye over these pages, let him pay a warm attention to the following observations, as I assure him they are the fruit of a poor devil's dear-bought experience. I have literally, like that great poet and great gallant, and by consequence that great fool, Solomon, "turned my eyes to behold madness and folly." Nay, I have, with all the ardour of a lively, fanciful, and whimsical imagination, accompanied with a warm feeling, poetic heart, shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship.

In the first place, let my pupil, as he tenders his own peace, keep up a regular, warm intercourse with the Deity.

8. To Mr James Burnes, Writer, Montrose.

Lochlea, 21*st June* 1783.

Dear Sir,—My father received your favour of the 10th current; and as he has been for some months very poorly in health, and is in his own opinion (and, indeed, in almost everybody's else) in a dying condition, he has only, with great difficulty, written a few farewell lines to each of his brothers-in-law. For this melancholy reason, I now hold the pen for him to thank you for your kind letter, and to assure you, Sir, that it shall not be my fault if my father's correspondence in the north die with him. My brother writes to John Caird, and to him I must refer you for the news of our family.

I shall only trouble you with a few particulars relative to the wretched state of this country. Our markets are exceedingly high; oatmeal 17*d.* and 18*d.* per peck, and not to be got even at that price. We have indeed been pretty well supplied with quantities of white peas from England and elsewhere, but that resource is likely to fail us, and what will become of us then, particularly the very poorest sort, Heaven only knows. This country, till of late, was flourishing incredibly in the manufacture of silk,

lawn, and carpet weaving; and we are still carrying on a good deal in that way, but much reduced from what it was. We had also a fine trade in the shoe way, but now entirely ruined, and hundreds driven to a starving condition on account of it. Farming is also at a very low ebb with us. Our lands, generally speaking, are mountainous and barren; and our landholders, full of ideas of farming gathered from the English and the Lothians, and other rich soils in Scotland, make no allowance for the odds of the quality of land, and consequently stretch us much beyond what in the event we will be found able to pay. We are also much at a loss for want of proper methods in our improvements of farming. Necessity compels us to leave our old schemes, and few of us have opportunities of being well informed in new ones. In short, my dear Sir, since the unfortunate beginning of this American war, and its as unfortunate conclusion, this country has been, and still is, decaying very fast. Even in higher life, a couple of our Ayrshire noblemen, and the major part of our knights and squires, are all insolvent. A miserable job of a Douglas, Heron, and Co.'s bank, which no doubt you heard of, has undone numbers of them; and imitating English and French, and other foreign luxuries and fopperies, has ruined as many more. There is a great trade of smuggling carried on along our coasts, which, however destructive to the interests of the kingdom at large, certainly enriches this corner of it, but too often at the expense of our morals. However, it enables individuals to make, at least for a time, a splendid appearance; but Fortune, as is usual with her when she is uncommonly lavish of her favours, is generally even with them at last: and happy were it for numbers of them if she would leave them no worse than when she found them.

My mother sends you a small present of a cheese; 'tis but a very little one, as our last year's stock is sold off; but if you could fix on any correspondent in Edinburgh or Glasgow, we would send you a proper one in the season. Mrs Black promises to take the cheese under her care so far, and then to send it to you by the Stirling carrier.

I shall conclude this long letter with assuring you that I

shall be very happy to hear from you, or any of our friends in your country, when opportunity serves.

My father sends you, probably for the last time in this world, his warmest wishes for your welfare and happiness; and my mother and the rest of the family desire to enclose their kind compliments to you, Mrs Burness, and the rest of your family, along with those of,—Dear Sir, Your affectionate Cousin, R. B.

9. To Dr Moore

Mauchline, *August 2nd*, 1787.

Sir,—For some months past I have been rambling over the country, but I am now confined with some lingering complaints, originating, as I take it, in the stomach. To divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of ennui, I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself. My name has made some little noise in this country; you have done me the honour to interest yourself very warmly in my behalf; and I think a faithful account of what character of a man I am, and how I came by that character, may perhaps amuse you in an idle moment. I will give you an honest narrative, though I know it will be often at my own expense; for I assure you, Sir, I have, like Solomon, whose character, excepting in the trifling affair of wisdom, I sometimes think I resemble, —I have, I say, like him turned my eyes to behold madness and folly, and like him, too, frequently shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship. After you have perused these pages, should you think them trifling and impertinent, I only beg leave to tell you, that the poor author wrote them under some twitching qualms of conscience, arising from a suspicion that he was doing what he ought not to do; a predicament he has more than once been in before.

I have not the most distant pretensions to assume that character which the pye-coated guardians of escutcheons call a gentleman. When at Edinburgh last winter, I got acquainted in the Herald's office; and, looking through

that granary of honours, I there found almost every name in the kingdom ; but for me,

> "My ancient but ignoble blood
> Has crept thro' scoundrels ever since the flood"

Gules, purpure, argent, etc., quite disowned me.

My father was of the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer, and was thrown by early misfortunes on the world at large ; where, after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom. I have met with few who understood men, their manners and their ways, equal to him ; but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances ; consequently, I was born a very poor man's son. For the first six or seven years of my life, my father was gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had he continued in that station, I must have marched off to be one of the little underlings about a farmhouse ; but it was his dearest wish and prayer to have it in his power to keep his children under his own eye, till they could discern between good and evil ; so with the assistance of his generous master, my father ventured on a small farm on his estate. At those years, I was by no means a favourite with anybody. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot piety. I say idiot piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar ; and by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my infant and boyish days, too, I owe much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry ; but had so strong an effect on my

imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was *The Vision of Mirza*, and a hymn of Addison's beginning, *How are thy servants blest, O Lord!* I particularly remember one half-stanza which was music to my boyish ear—

> "For though in dreadful whirls we hung
> High on the broken wave—"

I met with these pieces in *Mason's English Collection*, one of my schoolbooks. The first two books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were *The Life of Hannibal*, and *The History of Sir William Wallace*. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.

Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half mad, and I, ambitious of shining in conversation parties on Sundays, between sermons, at funerals, etc., used a few years afterwards to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour.

My vicinity to Ayr was of some advantage to me. My social disposition, when not checked by some modifications of spited pride, was like our catechism definition of infinitude, without bounds or limits. I formed several connexions with other younkers, who possessed superior advantages; the youngling actors who were busy in the rehearsal of parts, in which they were shortly to appear on the stage of life, where, alas! I was destined to drudge behind the scenes. It is not commonly at this green age, that our young gentry have a just sense of the immense distance between them and their ragged play-fellows. It

takes a few dashes into the world, to give the young great man that proper, decent, unnoticing disregard for the poor, insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him, who were, perhaps, born in the same village. My young superiors never insulted the clouterly appearance of my plough-boy carcase, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books; among them, even then, I could pick up some observations, and one, whose heart, I am sure, not even the "Munny Begum" scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these my young friends and benefactors, as they occasionally went off for the East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction; but I was soon called to more serious evils. My father's generous master died; the farm proved a ruinous bargain; and to clench the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of *Twa Dogs*. My father was advanced in life when he married; I was the eldest of seven children, and he, worn out by early hardships, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these two years, we retrenched our expenses. We lived very poorly: I was a dexterous ploughman for my age; and the next eldest to me was a brother (Gilbert), who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel-writer might, perhaps, have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley slave, brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn, my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scottish idiom:

she was a "bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass." In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and bookworm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell; you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, etc.; but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan, when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself.

Thus with me began love and poetry; which at times have been my only, and till within the last twelve months, have been my highest enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles farther in the country. The nature of the bargain he made was such as to throw a little ready money into his hands at the commencement of his lease, otherwise the affair would have been impracticable. For four years we lived comfortably here, but a difference commencing between him and his landlord as to terms, after three years' tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from the horrors of a jail, by a consumption, which, after two years' promises, kindly stepped in, and carried him away, to where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest!

It is during the time that we lived on this farm, that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps the most ungainly, awkward boy in the parish—no *solitaire* was less acquainted with the ways of the world. What I knew of ancient story was gathered from Salmon's and Guthrie's *Geographical Grammars;* and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature, and criticism, I got from the *Spectator*. These, with Pope's *Works*, some Plays of Shakspeare, *Tull and Dickson on Agriculture*, *The Pantheon*, Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, Justice's *British Gardener's Directory*, Boyle's *Lectures*, Allan Ramsay's *Works*, Taylor's *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, and Hervey's *Meditations*, had formed the whole of my reading. The collection of songs was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them, driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is.

In my seventeenth year, to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school. My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these meetings, and my going was, what to this moment I repent, in opposition to his wishes. My father, as I said before, was subject to strong passions; from that instance of disobedience in me, he took a sort of dislike to me, which, I believe, was one cause of the dissipation which marked my succeeding years. I say dissipation, comparatively with the strictness, and sobriety, and regularity of Presbyterian country life; for though the will-o'-wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path, yet early ingrained piety and virtue kept me for several years afterwards within the line of innocence. The great misfortune of my life was to want an aim. I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labour. The only two openings by which I could enter the temple of fortune were the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little

chicaning bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture I never could squeeze myself into it: the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance! Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly solitude; add to these incentives to social life, my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense; and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that always, where two or three met together, there was I among them. But far beyond all other impulses of my heart, was *un penchant à l'adorable moitié du genre humain.* My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and, as in every other warfare in this world, my fortune was various; sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared farther for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evenings in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on a love adventure without an assisting confidant. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid dexterity that recommended me as a proper second on these occasions; and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Tarbolton, as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe. The very goose-feather in my hand seems to know instinctively the well-worn path of my imagination, the favourite theme of my song; and is with difficulty restrained from giving you a couple of paragraphs on the love-adventures of my compeers, the humble inmates of the farm-house and cottage: but the grave sons of science, ambition, or avarice baptise these things by the name of follies. To the sons and daughters of labour and poverty they are matters of the most serious nature: to them the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious parts of their enjoyment.

Another circumstance in my life which made some alteration in my mind and manners, was, that I spent my seventeenth summer[1] on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home, at a noted school, to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, etc., in which I made a pretty good progress. But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were, till this time, new to me; but I was no enemy to social life. Here, though I learnt to fill my glass, and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a high hand with my geometry, till the sun entered Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my bosom, when a charming *fillette*, who lived next door to the school, overset my trigonometry, and set me off at a tangent from the spheres of my studies. I, however, struggled on with my sines and co-sines for a few days more; but stepping into the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, there I met my angel—

"Like Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower——."

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I staid I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless.

I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's Works: I had seen human nature in a new phasis; and I engaged several of my schoolfellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly. I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me, and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far,

[1] Query, nineteenth?

that though I had not three-farthings' worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of the day-book and ledger.

My life flowed on much in the same course till my twenty-third year. *Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle*, were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; Sterne and Mackenzie—*Tristram Shandy* and the *Man of Feeling*—were my bosom favourites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind, but it was only indulged in according to the humour of the hour. I had usually half-a-dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or other, as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed the work as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet! None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except, *Winter: a Dirge*, the eldest of my printed pieces; *The Death of Poor Mailie*, *John Barleycorn*, and Songs first, second, and third. Song second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school-business.

My twenty-third year was to me an important æra. Partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined a flax-dresser in a neighbouring town (Irvine), to learn his trade. This was an unlucky affair. My * * * and to finish the whole, as we were giving a welcome carousal to the new year, the shop took fire and burned to ashes, and I was left, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence.

I was obliged to give up this scheme; the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round my father's head; and, what was worst of all, he was visibly far gone in a consumption; and to crown my distresses, a *belle fille*, whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony, jilted me, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file, was my constitutional melancholy being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be

envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—depart from me, ye cursed!

From this adventure I learned something of a town life; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn, was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic; but a great man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the world, the poor fellow in despair went to sea; where, after a variety of good and ill-fortune, a little before I was acquainted with him he had been set on shore by an American privateer, on the wild coast of Connaught, stripped of every thing. I cannot quit this poor fellow's story without adding, that he is at this time master of a large West-Indiaman belonging to the Thames.

His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. In some measure I succeeded; I had pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded with horror. Here his friendship did me a mischief, and the consequence was, that soon after I resumed the plough, I wrote the *Poet's Welcome*.[1] My reading only increased while in this town by two stray volumes of *Pamela*, and one of *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, which gave me some idea of novels. Rhyme, except some religious pieces that are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's *Scottish Poems*, I strung anew my wildly-sounding lyre with emulating vigour. When my father died, his all went among the hell-hounds that growl in the kennel of justice; but we made a shift to collect a little money in the family amongst us, with which, to keep us together, my brother and I took a neighbouring farm. My

[1] *Rob the Rhymer's Welcome to his Bastard Child.*

brother wanted my hair-brained imagination, as well as my social and amorous madness; but in good sense, and every sober qualification, he was far my superior.

I entered on this farm with a full resolution, "come, go to, I will be wise!" I read farming books, I calculated crops; I attended markets; and in short, in spite of the devil, and the world, and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned, "like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

I now began to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light, was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them *dramatis personæ* in my *Holy Fair*. I had a notion myself that the piece had some merit; but, to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend, who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause. *Holy Willie's Prayer* next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, if haply any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my wanderings led me on another side, within point-blank shot of their heaviest metal. This is the unfortunate story that gave rise to my printed poem, *The Lament*. This was a most melancholy affair, which I cannot yet bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart, and mistaken the reckoning of rationality. I gave up my part of the farm to my brother; in truth it was only nominally mine; and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. But before leaving my native country for ever, I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power; I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it

should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver—or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits! I can truly say, that *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves. To know myself had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in my character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty. My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want of money to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde, for

"Hungry ruin had me in the wind."

I had been for some days skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia—*The Gloomy Night is Gathering Fast*, when a letter from Dr Blacklock to a friend of mine, overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. The doctor belonged to a set of critics for whose applause I had not dared to

hope. His opinion, that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith, for once made a revolution to the nadir; and a kind Providence placed me under the patronage of one of the noblest of men, the Earl of Glencairn. *Oublie moi, grand Dieu, si jamais je l'oublie!*

I need relate no farther. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to "catch" the characters and "the manners living as they rise." Whether I have profited, time will show.

. . . . . .

My most respectful compliments to Miss Williams. Her very elegant and friendly letter I cannot answer at present, as my presence is requisite in Edinburgh, and I set out tomorrow.—R. B.

10. To Mr Robert Muir

Stirling, *26th August* 1787.

My dear Sir,—I intended to have written you from Edinburgh, and now write you from Stirling to make an excuse. Here am I, on my way to Inverness, with a truly original, but very worthy man, a Mr Nicol, one of the masters of the High School in Edinburgh. I left Auld Reekie yesterday morning, and have passed, besides by-excursions, Linlithgow, Borrowstouness, Falkirk, and here am I undoubtedly. This morning I knelt at the tomb of Sir John the Graham, the gallant friend of the immortal Wallace; and two hours ago I said a fervent prayer for Old Caledonia over the hole in a blue whinstone, where Robert de Bruce fixed his royal standard on the banks of Bannockburn; and just now, from Stirling Castle, I have seen by the setting sun the glorious prospect of the windings of Forth through the rich carse of Stirling, and skirting the equally rich carse of Falkirk. The crops are very strong, but so very late that there is no harvest, except a

ridge or two perhaps in ten miles, all the way I have travelled from Edinburgh.

I left Andrew Bruce and family all well. I will be at least three weeks in making my tour, as I shall return by the coast, and have many people to call for.

My best compliments to Charles, our dear kinsman and fellow-saint; and Messrs W. and H. Parkers. I hope Hughoc is going on and prospering with God and Miss M'Causlin.

If I could think on anything sprightly, I should let you hear every other post; but a dull, matter-of-fact business like this scrawl, the less and seldomer one writes, the better.

Among other matters-of-fact I shall add this, that I am and ever shall be,—My dear Sir, your obliged R. B.

11. To Gavin Hamilton, Esq.

Stirling, *28th August* 1787.

My dear Sir,—Here am I on my way to Inverness. I have rambled over the rich, fertile carses of Falkirk and Stirling, and am delighted with their appearance: richly waving crops of wheat, barley, etc., but no harvest at all yet, except, in one or two places, an old wife's ridge. Yesterday morning I rode from this town up the meandering Devon's banks, to pay my respects to some Ayrshire folks at Harvieston. After breakfast, we made a party to go and see the famous Caudron-linn, a remarkable cascade in the Devon, about five miles above Harvieston; and after spending one of the most pleasant days I ever had in my life, I returned to Stirling in the evening. They are a family, Sir: though I had not had any prior tie, though they had not been the brother and sisters of a certain generous friend of mine, I would never forget them. I am told you have not seen them these several years, so you can have very little idea of what these young folks now are. Your brother is as tall as you are, but slender rather than otherwise; and I have the satisfaction to inform you that he is getting the better of those consumptive symptoms which I suppose you know were threatening him. His

make, and particularly his manner, resemble you, but he will still have a finer face. (I put in the word *still*, to please Mrs Hamilton.) Good sense, modesty, and at the same time a just idea of that respect that man owes to man, and has a right in his turn to exact, are striking features in his character; and, what with me is the Alpha and the Omega, he has a heart that might adorn the breast of a poet! Grace has a good figure, and the look of health and cheerfulness, but nothing else remarkable in her person. I scarcely ever saw so striking a likeness as is between her and your little Beenie; the mouth and chin particularly She is reserved at first; but as we grew better acquainted, I was delighted with the native frankness of her manner, and the sterling sense of her observation. Of Charlotte I cannot speak in common terms of admiration: she is not only beautiful, but lovely. Her form is elegant; her features not regular, but they have the smile of sweetness and the settled complacency of good nature in the highest degree; and her complexion, now that she has happily recovered her wonted health, is equal to Miss Burnet's. After the exercise of our riding to the Falls, Charlotte was exactly Dr Donne's mistress:—

> ———"Her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
> That one would almost say her body thought."

Her eyes are fascinating; at once expressive of good sense, tenderness, and a noble mind.

I do not give you all this account, my good Sir, to flatter you. I mean it to reproach you. Such relations the first peer in the realm might own with pride; then why do you not keep up more correspondence with these so amiable young folks? I had a thousand questions to answer about you. I had to describe the little ones with the minuteness of anatomy. They were highly delighted when I told them that John was so good a boy, and so fine a scholar, and that Willie was going on still very pretty; but I have it in commission to tell her from them that beauty is a poor silly bauble without she be good. Miss Chalmers I had left in Edinburgh, but I had the pleasure of meeting with Mrs Chalmers, only Lady Mackenzie being rather a little

alarmingly ill of a sore throat somewhat marred our enjoyment.

I shall not be in Ayrshire for four weeks. My most respectful compliments to Mrs Hamilton, Miss Kennedy, and Doctor Mackenzie. I shall probably write him from some stage or other. I am ever, Sir, yours most gratefully.—R. B.

12. To Mr Walker, Blair of Athole

Inverness, *5th September* 1787.

My dear Sir,—I have just time to write the foregoing, and to tell you that it was (at least most part of it) the effusion of an half-hour I spent at Bruar. I do not mean it was extempore, for I have endeavoured to brush it up as well as Mr Nicol's chat and the jogging of the chaise would allow. It eases my heart a good deal, as rhyme is the coin with which a poet pays his debts of honour or gratitude. What I owe to the noble family of Athole, of the first kind, I shall ever proudly boast; what I owe of the last, so help me God in my hour of need! I shall never forget.

The "little angel-band!" I declare I prayed for them very sincerely to-day at the Fall of Fyers. I shall never forget the fine family-piece I saw at Blair; the amiable, the truly noble Duchess, with her smiling little seraph in her lap, at the head of the table: the lovely "olive plants;" as the Hebrew bard finely says, round the happy mother: the beautiful Mrs G——; the lovely, sweet Miss C——, etc. I wish I had the powers of Guido to do them justice! My Lord Duke's kind hospitality—markedly kind indeed. Mr Graham of Fintry's charms of conversation—Sir W. Murray's friendship. In short, the recollections of all that polite, agreeable company raises an honest glow in my bosom.—R. B.

13. To Mr Gilbert Burns

Edinburgh, *17th September* 1787.

My dear Brother,—I arrived here safe yesterday evening, after a tour of twenty-two days, and travelling near six

hundred miles, windings included. My farthest stretch was about ten miles beyond Inverness. I went through the heart of the Highlands by Crieff, Taymouth, the famous seat of Lord Bredalbane, down the Tay, among cascades and Druidical circles of stones, to Dunkeld, a seat of the Duke of Athole; thence across Tay, and up one of his tributary streams to Blair of Athole, another of the Duke's seats, where I had the honour of spending nearly two days with his Grace and family; thence many miles through a wild country among cliffs gray with eternal snows and gloomy savage glens, till I crossed Spey and went down the stream through Strathspey—so famous in Scottish music—Badenoch, etc., till I reached Grant Castle, where I spent half a day with Sir James Grant and family; and then crossed the country for Fort George, but called by the way at Cawdor, the ancient seat of Macbeth; there I saw the identical bed, in which tradition says King Duncan was murdered: lastly, from Fort George to Inverness.

I returned by the coast, through Nairn, Forres, and so on, to Aberdeen, thence to Stonehive, where James Burness, from Montrose, met me by appointment. I spent two days among our relations, and found our aunts, Jean and Isabel, still alive, and hale old women. John Cairn, though born the same year with our father, walks as vigorously as I can: they have had several letters from his son in New York. William Brand is likewise a stout old fellow; but further particulars I delay till I see you, which will be in two or three weeks. The rest of my stages are not worth rehearsing: warm as I was from Ossian's country, where I had seen his very grave, what cared I for fishing-towns or fertile carses? I slept at the famous Brodie of Brodie's one night, and dined at Gordon Castle next day, with the Duke, Duchess, and family. I am thinking to cause my old mare to meet me, by means of John Ronald, at Glasgow; but you shall hear farther from me before I leave Edinburgh. My duty and many compliments from the north to my mother; and my brotherly compliments to the rest. I have been trying for a berth for William, but am not likely to be successful. Farewell.—R. B.

14. To Miss Margaret Chalmers

September 26th, 1787.

I send Charlotte the first number of the songs; I would not wait for the second number; I hate delays in little marks of friendship, as I hate dissimulation in the language of the heart. I am determined to pay Charlotte a poetic compliment, if I could hit on some glorious old Scotch air, in number second. You will see a small attempt on a shred of paper in the book; but, though Dr Blacklock commended it very highly, I am not just satisfied with it myself. I intend to make it a description of some kind: the whining cant of love, except in real passion, and by a masterly hand, is to me as insufferable as the preaching cant of old Father Smeaton, Whig-minister at Kilmaurs. Darts, flames, Cupids, loves, graces, and all that farrago, are just a Mauchline . . . a senseless rabble.

I got an excellent poetic epistle yesternight from the old, venerable author of *Tullochgorum*, *John of Badenyon*, etc. I suppose you know he is a clergyman. It is by far the finest poetic compliment I ever got. I will send you a copy of it.

I go on Thursday or Friday to Dumfries, to wait on Mr Miller about his farms. Do tell that to Lady Mackenzie, that she may give me credit for a little wisdom. "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence." What a blessed fireside! How happy should I be to pass a winter evening under their venerable roof! and smoke a pipe of tobacco, or drink water-gruel with them! What solemn, lengthened, laughter-quashing gravity of phiz! What sage remarks on the good-for-nothing sons and daughters of indiscretion and folly! And what frugal lessons, as we straitened the fireside circle, on the uses of the poker and tongs!

Miss N.[immo] is very well, and begs to be remembered in the old way to you. I used all my eloquence, all the persuasive flourishes of the hand, and heart-melting modulation of periods in my power, to urge her out to Harvieston, but all in vain. My rhetoric seems quite to

have lost its effect on the lovely half of mankind. I have seen the day—but that is a "tale of other years." In my conscience I believe that my heart has been so oft on fire that it is absolutely vitrified. I look on the sex with something like the admiration with which I regard the starry sky in a frosty December night. I admire the beauty of the Creator's workmanship; I am charmed with the wild but graceful eccentricity of their motions, and—wish them good night. I mean this with respect to a certain passion *dont j'ai eu l'honneur d'être un miserable esclave:* as for friendship, you and Charlotte have given me pleasure, permanent pleasure, "which the world cannot give nor take away," I hope; and which will outlast the heavens and the earth.—R. B.

15. To the Same

Without date.

I HAVE been at Dumfries, and at one visit more shall be decided about a farm in that country. I am rather hopeless in it; but as my brother is an excellent farmer, and is, besides, an exceedingly prudent, sober man (qualities which are only a younger brother's fortune in our family), I am determined, if my Dumfries business fail me, to return into partnership with him, and at our leisure take another farm in the neighbourhood.

I assure you I look for high compliments from you and Charlotte on this very sage instance of my unfathomable, incomprehensible wisdom. Talking of Charlotte, I must tell her that I have, to the best of my power, paid her a poetic compliment, now completed. The air is admirable: true old Highland. It was the tune of a Gaelic song, which an Inverness lady sung me when I was there; and I was so charmed with it that I begged her to write me a set of it from her singing; for it had never been set before. I am fixed that it shall go in Johnson's next number; so Charlotte and you need not spend your precious time in contradicting me. I won't say the poetry is first-rate; though I am convinced it is very well; and,

what is not always the case with compliments to ladies, it is not only sincere, but just.

"How pleasant the banks of the clear-winding Devon,
With green-spreading bushes, and flowers blooming fair!
But the boniest flower on the banks of the Devon
Was once a sweet bud on the braes of the Ayr.

Mild be the sun on this sweet blushing flower,
In the gay rosy morn as it bathes in the dew!
And gentle the fall of the soft vernal shower,
That steals on the evening each leaf to renew.

O, spare the dear blossom, ye orient breezes,
With chill hoary wing as ye usher the dawn!
And far be thou distant, thou reptile that seizes
The verdure and pride of the garden and lawn!

Let Bourbon exult in his gay gilded lilies,
And England triumphant display her proud rose;
A fairer than either adorns the green valleys
Where Devon, sweet Devon, meandering flows."

R. B.

16. Extract from Commonplace Book

Ellisland, *Sunday, 14th* [*15th?*] *June* 1788.

This is now the third day that I have been in this country. "Lord! what is man?" What a bustling little bundle of passions, appetites, ideas, and fancies! And what a capricious kind of existence he has here! . . . There is indeed an elsewhere, where, as Thomson says, *virtue sole survives.*

——"Tell us, ye dead;
Will none of you in pity disclose the secret,
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be?
——————A little time
Will make us wise as you are, and as close."

I am such a coward in life, so tired of the service, that I would almost at any time, with Milton's Adam, "gladly lay me in my mother's lap, and be at peace."

But a wife and children bind me to struggle with the stream, till some sudden squall shall overset the silly vessel; or, in the listless return of years, its own craziness reduce it to a wreck. Farewell now to those giddy follies,

those varnished vices, which, though half sanctified by the bewitching levity of wit and humour, are at best but thriftless idling with the precious current of existence; nay, often poisoning the whole, that, like the plains of Jericho, *the water is naught and the ground barren*, and nothing short of a supernaturally-gifted Elisha can ever after heal the evils.

Wedlock—the circumstance that buckles me hardest to care—if virtue and religion were to be anything with me but names, was what in a few seasons I must have resolved on: in my present situation it was absolutely necessary. Humanity, generosity, honest pride of character, justice to my own happiness for after life, so far as it could depend (which it surely will a great deal) on internal peace; all these joined their warmest suffrages, their most powerful solicitations, with a rooted attachment, to urge the step I have taken. Nor have I any reason on her part to repent it. I can fancy how, but have never seen where, I could have made a better choice. Come, then, let me act up to my favourite motto, that glorious passage in Young—

> "On reason build resolve,
> That column of true majesty in man!"

17. To Mrs Dunlop

Ellisland, *New-year-day Morning*, 1789.

This, dear Madam, is a morning of wishes, and would to God that I came under the Apostle James's description!—"the prayer of a righteous man availeth much." In that case, Madam, you should welcome in a year full of blessings: everything that obstructs or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment should be removed, and every pleasure that frail humanity can taste should be yours. I own myself so little a Presbyterian, that I approve set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

This day—the first Sunday of May—a breezy, blue-

skied noon some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of autumn—these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday.

I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the *Spectator*, *The Vision of Mirza*, a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables: "On the 5th day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my forefathers, I always *keep holy*, after having washed myself and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdad, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer."

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which on minds of a different cast makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the harebell, the foxglove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Æolian harp, passive takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or wo beyond death and the grave!

R. B.

18. To Dr Moore

Ellisland, *4th January* 1789.

Sir,—As often as I think of writing to you, which has been three or four times every week these six months, I

gives me something so like the idea of an ordinary-sized statue offering at a conversation with the Rhodian Colossus, that my mind misgives me, and the affair always miscarries somewhere between purpose and resolve. I have at last got some business with you, and business letters are written by the style-book. I say my business is with you, Sir; for you never had any with me, except the business that benevolence has in the mansion of poverty.

The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late *éclat* was owing to the singularity of my situation and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I said in the preface to my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from Nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but the knack, the aptitude to learn the Muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him "who forms the secret bias of the soul;" but I as firmly believe that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labour, attention, and pains—at least I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the press I put off to a very distant day—a day that may never arrive; but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour. Nature has given very few, if any, of the profession the talents of shining in every species of composition. I shall try (for until trial it is impossible to know) whether she has qualified me to shine in any one. The worst of it is, by the time one has finished a piece, it has been so often viewed and reviewed before the mental eye, that one loses in a good measure the powers of critical discrimination. Here the best criterion I know is a friend, not only of abilities to judge, but with good-nature enough, like a prudent teacher with a young learner, to praise perhaps a little more than is exactly just, lest the thin-skinned animal fall into that most deplorable of all poetic diseases—heart-breaking despondency of himself. Dare I, Sir, already immensely indebted to your goodness, ask the additional obligation of your being that friend to me? I enclose you an essay of mine, in a walk of poesy to me entirely new; I mean the Epistle addressed to R. G., Esq., or Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq., a gentleman of uncommon worth,

to whom I lie under very great obligations. The story of the poem, like most of my poems, is connected with my own story; and to give you the one I must give you something of the other. I cannot boast of Mr Creech's ingenuous fair-dealing to me. He kept me hanging about Edinburgh from the 7th August 1787, until the 13th April 1788, before he would condescend to give me a statement of affairs; nor had I got it even then, but for an angry letter I wrote him, which irritated his pride. "I could" not "a tale," but a detail, "unfold;" but what am I that should speak against the Lord's anointed Bailie of Edinburgh.

I believe I shall in whole, £100 copyright included, clear about £400 some little odds; and even part of this depends upon what the gentleman has yet to settle with me. I give you this information, because you did me the honour to interest yourself much in my welfare. I give you this information, but I give it to yourself only; for I am still much in the gentleman's mercy. Perhaps I injure the man in the idea I am sometimes tempted to have of him: God forbid I should! A little time will try, for in a month I shall go to town to wind up the business, if possible.

To give the rest of my story in brief: I have married "my Jean," and taken a farm. With the first step I have every day more and more reason to be satisfied; with the last it is rather the reverse. I have a younger brother, who supports my aged mother; another still younger brother, and three sisters, in a farm. On my last return from Edinburgh it cost me about £180 to save them from ruin. Not that I have lost so much: I only interposed between my brother and his impending fate by the loan of so much. I give myself no airs on this, for it was mere selfishness on my part: I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favour might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning*. There is still one thing would make my circumstances quite easy; I have an Excise-officer's commission, and I live in the midst of a country division. My request to Mr Graham, who is one of the commissioners of Excise, was, if in his power, to procure me that

division. If I were very sanguine, I might hope that some of my great patrons might procure me a treasury-warrant for supervisor, surveyor-general, etc.

Thus, secure of a livelihood, "to thee, sweet Poetry, delightful maid," I would consecrate my future days.

R. B.

19. To Mr Robert Ainslie

Ellisland, *January* 6, 1789.

Many happy returns of the season to you, my dear Sir. May you be comparatively happy, up to your comparative worth, among the sons of men; which wish would, I am sure, make you one of the most blest of the human race.

I do not know if passing a "writer to the Signet" be a trial of scientific merit or a mere business of friends and interest. However it be, let me quote you my two favourite passages, which, though I have repeated them ten thousand times, still they rouse my manhood and steel my resolution like inspiration.

> "————On Reason build resolve,
> That column of true majesty in man."—*Young.*
>
> "Hear, Alfred, hero of the state,
> Thy Genius Heaven's high will declare;
> The triumph of the truly great,
> Is never, never to despair!
> Is never to despair!"—*Masque of Alfred.*

I grant you enter the lists of life to struggle for bread, business, notice, and distinction, in common with hundreds. But who are they? Men like yourself, and of that aggregate body your compeers, seven-tenths of them come short of your advantages, natural and accidental; while two of those that remain, either neglect their parts, as flowers blooming in a desert, or misspend their strength, like a bull goring a bramble bush.

But to change the theme: I am still catering for Johnson's publication; and among others I have brushed up the following old favourite song a little, with a view to your worship. I have only altered a word here and there; but if you like the humour of it, we shall think of a stanza or two to add to it.—R. B.

20. To Bishop Geddes [1]

Ellisland, *February 3rd*, 1789.

Venerable Father,—As I am conscious that, wherever I am, you do me the honour to interest yourself in my welfare, it gives me pleasure to inform you, that I am here at last, stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination, to attend to those great and important questions —what I am? where I am? and for what I am destined.

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by Nature and Nature's God. I was sensible that to so helpless a creature as a poor poet a wife and family were incumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself, on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity, would, to me, ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice. Besides, I had in "my Jean" a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit?

In the affair of a livelihood, I think myself tolerably secure: I have good hopes of my farm; but should they fail, I have an excise commission, which, on my simple petition, will at any time procure me bread. There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an excise officer, but I do not pretend to borrow honour from my profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is luxury to anything that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect.

Thus, with a rational aim and method in life, you may easily guess, my reverend and much-honoured friend, that my characteristical trade is not forgotten. I am, if possible, more than ever an enthusiast to the Muses. I

[1] John Geddes, born 1735, at Enzie, Banff. Consecrated (R. C. bishop in 1780.

am determined to study man and nature, and in that view incessantly; and to try if the ripening and corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving.

You will see in your book, which I beg your pardon for detaining so long, that I have been tuning my lyre on the banks of Nith. Some large poetic plans that are floating in my imagination, or partly put in execution, I shall impart to you when I have the pleasure of meeting with you; which, if you are then in Edinburgh, I shall have about the beginning of March.

That acquaintance, worthy Sir, with which you were pleased to honour me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connexion with the merely great, I cannot lose the patronising notice of the learned and good without the bitterest regret.—R. B.

21. To Mr James Burnes

Ellisland, *9th February* 1789.

My dear Sir,—Why I did not write to you long ago is what, even on the rack, I could not answer. If you can in your mind form an idea of indolence, dissipation, hurry, cares, change of country, entering on untried scenes of life, all combined, you will save me the trouble of a blushing apology. It could not be want of regard for a man for whom I had a high esteem before I knew him—an esteem which has much increased since I did know him; and this caveat entered, I shall plead guilty to any other indictment with which you shall please to charge me.

After I parted from you, for many months my life was one continued scene of dissipation. Here at last I am become stationary, and have taken a farm and—a wife.

The farm is beautifully situated on the Nith, a large river that runs by Dumfries, and falls into the Solway Frith. I have gotten a lease of my farm as long as I pleased; but how it may turn out is just a guess, and it is yet to improve and enclose, etc.; however, I have good hopes of my bargain on the whole.

My wife is my Jean, with whose story you are partly acquainted. I found I had a much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and I durst not trifle with so sacred a deposit. Indeed I have not any reason to repent the step I have taken, as I have attached myself to a very good wife, and have shaken myself loose of every bad failing.

I have found my book a very profitable business, and with the profits of it I have begun life pretty decently. Should Fortune not favour me in farming, as I have no great faith in her fickle ladyship, I have provided myself in another resource, which, however some folks may affect to despise it, is still a comfortable shift in the day of misfortune. In the heyday of my fame, a gentleman, whose name at least I daresay you know, as his estate lies somewhere near Dundee, Mr Graham of Fintry, one of the Commissioners of Excise, offered me the commission of an excise officer. I thought it prudent to accept the offer; and accordingly I took my instructions, and have my commission by me. Whether I may ever do duty, or be a penny the better for it, is what I do not know; but I have the comfortable assurance that, come whatever ill fate will, I can, on my simple petition to the excise-board, get into employ.

We have lost poor uncle Robert this winter. He has long been very weak, and with a very little alteration on him, he expired 3rd Jan.

His son William has been with me this winter, and goes in May to be an apprentice to a mason. His other son, the eldest, John, comes to me, I expect, in summer. They are both remarkably stout young fellows, and promise to do well. His only daughter, Fanny, has been with me ever since her father's death, and I purpose keeping her in my family till she be quite woman grown, and fit for better service. She is one of the cleverest girls, and has one of the most amiable dispositions, I have ever seen.

All friends in this country and Ayrshire are well. Remember me to all friends in the north. My wife joins me in compliments to Mrs B. and family.—I am ever, my dear Cousin, yours sincerely, R. B.

22. To Mrs Dunlop

Ellisland, *4th March* 1789.

Here am I, my honoured friend, returned safe from the capital. To a man who has a home, however humble or remote—if that home is like mine, the scene of domestic comfort—the bustle of Edinburgh will soon be a business of sickening disgust.

"Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate you!"

When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim, "What merits has he had, or what demerit have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world the sport of folly, or the victim of pride?" I have read somewhere of a monarch (in Spain I think it was), who was so out of humour with the Ptolemean system of astronomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved Him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech; but often, as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Princes Street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a perspective. This trifling alteration, not to mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb sinews of many of his Majesty's liege subjects, in the way of tossing the head and tiptoe strutting, would evidently turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us at once to adjust the ceremonials in making a bow, or making way to a great man, and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature itself requires; as a measuring-

glance at its towering altitude would determine the affair like instinct.

You are right, Madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem, which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is, by far, too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish poets, that the very term Scottish poetry borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr Carfrae, I shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances, and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter. In the meantime allow me to close this epistle with a few lines done by a friend of mine * * * * *. I give you them, that, as you have seen the original, you may guess whether one or two alterations I have ventured to make in them be any real improvement.

"Like the fair plant that from our touch withdraws,
Shrink, mildly fearful, even from applause;
Be all a mother's fondest hope can dream,
And all you are, my charming * * * *, seem.
Straight as the fox-glove, ere her bells disclose,
Mild as the maiden-blushing hawthorn blows,
Fair as the fairest of each lovely kind,
Your form shall be the image of your mind;
Your manners shall so true your soul express,
That all shall long to know the worth they guess;
Congenial hearts shall greet with kindred love,
And even sick'ning envy must approve." R. B.

23. To Dr Moore

Ellisland, 23*rd March* 1789.

Sir,—The gentleman who will deliver you this is a Mr Nielson, a worthy clergyman in my neighbourhood, and a very particular acquaintance of mine. As I have troubled

him with this packet, I must turn him over to your goodness, to recompense him for it in a way in which he much needs your assistance, and where you can effectually serve him. Mr Nielson is on his way for France, to wait on his Grace of Queensberry, on some little business of a good deal of importance to him, and he wishes for your instructions respecting the most eligible mode of travelling, etc., for him, when he has crossed the Channel. I should not have dared to take this liberty with you, but that I am told, by those who have the honour of your personal acquaintance, that to be a poor honest Scotchman is a letter of recommendation to you, and that to have it in your power to serve such a character gives you much pleasure.

The enclosed ode is a compliment to the memory of the late Mrs Oswald, of Auchencruive. You, probably, knew her personally, an honour of which I cannot boast; but I spent my early years in her neighbourhood, and among her servants and tenants. I know that she was detested with the most heartfelt cordiality. However, in the particular part of her conduct which roused my poetic wrath, she was much less blameable. In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had put up at Bailie Whigham's, in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labours of the day; and just as my friend the Bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm over a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry of the late great Mrs Oswald, and poor I am forced to brave all the horrors of the tempestuous night, and jade my horse, my young favourite horse, whom I had just christened Pegasus, twelve miles farther on, through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock, the next inn. The powers of poesy and prose sink under me, when I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the enclosed ode.

I was at Edinburgh lately, and settled finally with Mr Creech; and I must own that at last he has been amicable and fair with me.—R. B.

24. To Mrs Dunlop

Ellisland, *21st June* 1789.

Dear Madam,—Will you take the effusions, the miserable effusions, of low spirits, just as they flow from their bitter spring? I know not of any particular cause for this worst of all my foes besetting me; but for some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages.

Monday Evening.

I have just heard Mr Kirkpatrick preach a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him; but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord, deliver me! Religion, my honoured friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensible Great Being, to whom I owe my existence; and that He must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment, of this creature which He has made; these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and, consequently, that I am an accountable creature; that from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave; must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm, that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of His doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though, *to appearance*, He Himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species—therefore Jesus Christ was from God.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness, of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

What think you, Madam, of my creed? I trust that I

have said nothing that will lesson me in the eye of one whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind.—R. B.

25. To Mr James Johnson, Edinburgh

[About *May* 17, 1796.]

How are you, my dear friend, and how comes on your fifth volume? You may probably think that for some time past I have neglected you and your work; but, alas! the hand of pain, and sorrow, and care, has these many months lain heavy on me! Personal and domestic affliction have almost entirely banished that alacrity and life with which I used to woo the rural Muse of Scotia. In the meantime let us finish what we have so well begun. The gentleman, Mr Lewars, a particular friend of mine, will bring out any proofs (if they are ready) or any message you may have. Farewell!—R. B.

[*Turn over.*

[About *June* 17.]

You should have had this when Mr Lewars called on you, but his saddle-bags miscarried. I am extremely anxious for your work, as, indeed, I am for everything concerning you and your welfare. You are a good, worthy, honest fellow, and have a good right to live in this world—because you deserve it. Many a merry meeting this publication has given us, and possibly it may give us more, though, alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow, consuming illness which hangs over me will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the poet to far more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit or the pathos of sentiment! However, *hope* is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it as well as I can.

Let me hear from you as soon as convenient. Your work is a great one; and now that it is near finished, I

see, if we were to begin again, two or three things that might be mended; yet I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your publication will be the text-book and standard of Scottish song and music.

I am ashamed to ask another favour of you, because you have been so very good already; but my wife has a very particular friend of hers, a young lady who sings well, to whom she wishes to present the *Scots Musical Museum*. If you have a spare copy, will you be so obliging as to send it by the very first *fly*, as I am anxious to have it soon.—Yours ever, R. B.

26. To Mr Cunningham

Brow, Sea-Bathing Quarters, *7th July* 1796.

My dear Cunningham,—I received yours here this moment, and am indeed highly flattered with the approbation of the literary circle you mention—a literary circle inferior to none in the two kingdoms. Alas! my friend, I fear the voice of the bard will soon be heard among you no more! For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bed-fast and sometimes not; but these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism, which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me. Pale, emaciated, and so feeble as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled! fled!—but I can no more on the subject—only the medical folks tell me that my last and only chance is bathing, and country quarters, and riding. The deuce of the matter is this: when an exciseman is off duty, his salary is reduced to £35 instead of £50. What way, in the name of thrift, shall I maintain myself, and keep a horse in country quarters, with a wife and five children at home, on £35? I mention this, because I had intended to beg your utmost interest, and that of all the friends you can muster, to move our Commissioners of Excise to grant me the full salary; I dare say you know them all personally. If they do not grant it me, I must lay my account with an exit truly *en poëte*—if I die not of disease, I must perish with hunger.

I have sent you one of the songs; the other my memory does not serve me with, and I have no copy here; but I shall be at home soon, when I will send it you. *Apropos* to being at home, Mrs Burns threatens in a week or two to add one more to my paternal charge, which, if of the right gender, I intend shall be introduced to the world by the respectable designation of *Alexander Cunningham Burns*. My last was *James Glencairn*, so you can have no objection to the company of nobility. Farewell.—R. B.

27. To Mr Gilbert Burns

10th July 1796.

Dear Brother,—It will be no very pleasing news to you to be told that I am dangerously ill, and not likely to get better. An inveterate rheumatism has reduced me to such a state of debility, and my appetite is so totally gone, that I can scarcely stand on my legs. I have been a week at sea-bathing, and I will continue there, or in a friend's house in the country, all the summer. God keep my wife and children! if I am taken from their head, they will be poor indeed. I have contracted one or two serious debts, partly from my illness these many months, partly from too much thoughtlessness as to expense when I came to town, that will cut in too much on the little I leave them in your hands. Remember me to my mother.—Yours, R. B.

28. To G. Thomson

Brow, *4th July*.

My dear Sir,—I received your songs: but my health is so precarious, nay, dangerously situated, that as a last effort I am here at sea-bathing quarters. Besides my inveterate rheumatism, my appetite is quite gone, and I am so emaciated as to be scarce able to support myself on my own legs! Alas! is this a time for me to woo the Muses? However, I am still anxiously willing to serve your work, and, if possible, shall try. I would not like to see another employed, unless you could lay your hand upon a poet whose productions would be equal to the rest. You will

see my remarks and alterations on the margin of each song. My address is still Dumfries. Farewell, and God bless you !—R. B.

29. To Mrs Burns

Brow, *Thursday.*

My dearest Love,—I delayed writing until I could tell you what effect sea-bathing was likely to produce. It would be injustice to deny that it has eased my pains, and I think has strengthened me; but my appetite is still extremely bad. No flesh nor fish can I swallow: porridge and milk are the only things I can taste. I am very happy to hear, by Miss Jess Lewars, that you are all well. My very best and kindest compliments to her, and to all the children. I will see you on Sunday.—Your affectionate Husband, R. B.

30. To Mrs Dunlop

Brow, *Saturday, 12th July* 1796.

Madam,—I have written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again, but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me in all probability will speedily send me beyond that *bourn whence no traveller returns*. Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell!!!

R. B.

31. To Mr James Burnes, Writer, Montrose

Dumfries, *12th July.*

My dear Cousin,—When you offered me money assistance, little did I think I should want it so soon. A

rascal of a haberdasher, to whom I owe a considerable bill, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process against me, and will infallibly put my emaciated body into jail. Will you be so good as to accommodate me, and that by return of post, with ten pounds? O, James! did you know the pride of my heart, you would feel doubly for me. Alas! I am not used to beg. The worst of it is, my health was coming about finely; you know, and my physician assured me, that melancholy and low spirits are half my disease: guess, then, my horrors since this business began. If I had it settled, I would be, I think, quite well in a manner. How shall I use the language to you, O do not disappoint me! but strong necessity's curst command.

I have been thinking over and over my brother's affairs, and I fear I must cut him up; but on this I will correspond at another time, particularly as I shall [require] your advice.

Forgive me for once more mentioning by return of post; —save me from the horrors of a jail!

My compliments to my friend James, and to all the rest. I do not know what I have written. The subject is so horrible, I dare not look it over again. Farewell.

R. B.

32. To G. Thomson

Brow, on the Solway Frith, *12th July* 1796.

After all my boasted independence, curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel wretch of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously; for, upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds' worth of the neatest song-genius you have seen. I tried my hand on *Rothemurche* this morning. The measure is so difficult, that it is impossible to infuse much genius into the lines; they

are on the other side. ("Full well thou know'st." *Page* 197.) Forgive, forgive me!

33. To James Gracie, Esq.

Brow, *Wednesday Morning*, 16*th July* 1796.

My dear Sir,—It would [be] doing high injustice to this place not to acknowledge that my rheumatisms have derived great benefits from it already; but, alas! my loss of appetite still continues. I shall not need your kind offer *this week*, and I return to town the beginning of next week, it not being a tide week. I am detaining a man in a burning hurry; so, God bless you!—R. B.

34. To Mr James Armour, Mauchline

Dumfries, 18*th July* 1796.

My dear Sir,—Do, for Heaven's sake, send Mrs Armour here immediately. My wife is hourly expecting to be put to bed. Good God! what a situation for her to be in, poor girl, without a friend! I returned from sea-bathing quarters to-day, and my medical friends would almost persuade me that I am better; but I think and feel that my strength is so gone that the disorder will prove fatal to me.—Your Son-in-law, R. B.

BURNS'S BORDER TOUR

LEFT Edinburgh (May 6, 1787).—Lammermuir hills miserably dreary, but at times very picturesque. Lanton-edge, a glorious view of the Merse.—Reach Berrywell [near Dunse]—old Mr Ainslie an uncommon character; his hobbies agriculture, natural philosophy, and politics. In the first he is unexceptionably the clearest-headed, best-informed man I ever met with; in the other two very intelligent. As a man of business he has uncommon merit, and by fairly deserving it has made a very decent independence. Mrs Ainslie, an excellent, sensible, cheerful, amiable old woman. Miss Ainslie—her person a little *embonpoint*, but handsome; her face, particularly her eyes, full of sweetness and good humour. She unites three qualities rarely to be found together: keen, solid penetration; sly, witty observation and remark; and the gentlest, most unaffected female modesty. Douglas, a clever, fine promising young fellow. The family-meeting with their brother, my *compagnon de voyage*, very charming, particularly the sister. The whole family remarkably attached to their menials—Mrs A. full of stories of the sagacity and sense of the little girl in the kitchen; Mr A. high in the praises of an African, his house-servant: all his people old in his service—Douglas's old nurse came to Berrywell yesterday to remind them of its being his birthday.

A Mr Dudgeon, a poet at times, a worthy remarkable character—natural penetration, a great deal of information, some genius, and extreme modesty.

Sunday.—Went to church at Dunse. Dr Bowmaker a man of strong lungs and pretty judicious remark; but ill skilled in propriety, and altogether unconscious of his want of it.

Monday.—Coldstream—went over to England—Cornhill, glorious river Tweed—clear and majestic—fine bridge. Dine at Coldstream with Mr Ainslie and Mr Foreman—beat Mr F. in a dispute about Voltaire. Tea at Lenel House with Mr Brydone. Mr Brydone a most excellent heart, kind, joyous, and benevolent: but a good deal of the French indiscriminate complaisance—from his situation past and present, an admirer of everything that bears a splendid title, or that possesses a large estate. Mrs Brydone a most elegant woman in her person and manners; the tones of her voice remarkably sweet—my reception extremely flattering—sleep at Coldstream.

Tuesday.—Breakfast at Kelso—charming situation of Kelso—fine bridge over the Tweed—enchanting views and prospects on both sides of the river, particularly the Scotch side; introduced to Mr Scott of the Royal Bank, an excellent, modest fellow—fine situation of it—ruins of Roxburgh Castle—a holly-bush growing where James II. of Scotland was accidentally killed by the bursting of a cannon. A small old religious ruin, and a fine old garden planted by the religious, rooted out and destroyed by an English Hottentot, a *maître d'hôtel* of the Duke's, a Mr Cole. Climate and soil of Berwickshire, and even Roxburghshire, superior to Ayrshire—bad roads. Turnip and sheep husbandry, their great improvements—Mr M'Dowal, at Caverton Mill, a friend of Mr Ainslie's, with whom I dined to-day, sold his sheep, ewe and lamb together, at two guineas apiece—wash their sheep before shearing—seven or eight pounds of washen wool in a fleece—low markets, consequently low rents—fine lands not above sixteen shillings a Scotch acre—magnificence of farmers and farm-houses—come up Teviot and up Jed to Jedburgh to lie, and so wish myself a good night.

Wednesday.—Breakfast with Mr —— in Jedburgh—a squabble between Mrs ——, a crazed, talkative slattern, and a sister of hers, an old maid, respecting a relief minister—Miss gives Madam the lie; and Madam, by way of revenge, upbraids her that she laid snares to entangle the said minister, then a widower, in the net of matri-

mony. Go about two miles out of Jedburgh to a roup of parks—meet a polite, soldier-like gentleman, a Captain Rutherford, who had been many years through the wilds of America, a prisoner among the Indians—charming, romantic situation of Jedburgh, with gardens, orchards, etc., intermingled among the houses—fine old ruins—a once magnificent cathedral, and strong castle. All the towns here have the appearance of old, rude grandeur, but the people extremely idle—Jed a fine romantic little river.

Dine with Capt. Rutherford — the Captain a polite fellow, fond of money in his farming way; showed a particular respect to my bardship—his lady exactly a proper matrimonial second part for him. Miss Rutherford a beautiful girl, but too far gone woman to expose so much of a fine swelling bosom—her face very fine.

Return to Jedburgh—walk up Jed with some ladies to be shown Love-lane and Blackburn, two fairy scenes. Introduced to Mr Potts, writer, a very clever fellow; and Mr Somerville, the clergyman of the place, a man, and a gentleman, but sadly addicted to punning. The walking party of ladies: Mrs —— and Miss —— her sister, before mentioned. N.B.—These two appear still more comfortably ugly and stupid, and bore me most shockingly.—Two Miss ——, tolerably agreeable. Miss Hope, a tolerably pretty girl, fond of laughing and fun. Miss Lindsay, a good-humoured, amiable girl; rather short *et embonpoint*, but handsome and extremely graceful—beautiful hazel eyes, full of spirit, and sparkling with delicious moisture—an engaging face—*un tout ensemble* that speaks her of the first order of female minds. Her sister, a bonie, strappan, rosy, sonsie lass. Shake myself loose, after several unsuccessful efforts, of Mrs —— and Miss ——, and somehow or other get hold of Miss Lindsay's arm. My heart is thawed into melting pleasure after being so long frozen up in the Greenland Bay of indifference, amid the noise and nonsense of Edinburgh. Miss seems very well pleased with my bardship's distinguishing her, and after some slight qualms, which I could easily mark, she sets the titter round at defiance, and kindly allows me to keep my hold; and when parted by the ceremony of my intro-

duction to Mr Somerville, she met me half, to resume my situation.——*Nota Bene.* The Poet within a point and a half of being d-mnably in love—I am afraid my bosom is still nearly as much tinder as ever.

The old, cross-grained, whiggish, ugly, slanderous Miss ——, with all the poisonous spleen of a disappointed, ancient maiden, stops me very unseasonably to ease her bursting breast, by falling abusively foul on the Miss Lindsays, particularly on my Dulcinea;—I hardly refrain from cursing her to her face for daring to mouth her calumnious slander on one of the finest pieces of the workmanship of Almighty Excellence! Sup at Mr ——'s; vexed that the Miss Lindsays are not of the supper-party, as they only are wanting. Mrs —— and Miss —— still improve infernally on my hands.

Set out next morning for Wauchope, the seat of my correspondent, Mrs Scott—breakfast by the way with Dr Elliot, an agreeable, good-hearted, climate-beaten old veteran, in the medical line; now retired to a romantic but rather moorish place, on the banks of the Roole—he accompanies us almost to Wauchope—we traverse the country to the top of Bochester, the scene of an old encampment, and Woolee Hill.

Wauchope.—Mr Scott exactly the figure and face commonly given to Sancho Panca—very shrewd in his farming matters, and not unfrequently stumbles on what may be called a strong thing rather than a good thing. Mrs Scott all the sense, taste, intrepidity of face, and bold, critical decision, which usually distinguish female authors. Sup with Mr Potts—agreeable party. Breakfast next morning with Mr Somerville—the *bruit* of Miss Lindsay and my bardship, by means of the invention and malice of Miss ——. Mr Somerville sends to Dr Lindsay; begging him and family to breakfast if convenient, but at all events to send Miss Lindsay; accordingly Miss Lindsay only comes. I find Miss Lindsay would soon play the devil with me—I met with some little flattering attentions from her. Mrs Somerville an excellent, motherly, agreeable woman, and a fine family. Mr Ainslie and Mrs S. junrs., with Mr ——, Miss Lindsay, and myself, go to see *Esther*, a very remarkable woman for reciting poetry of all kinds,

and sometimes making Scotch doggrel herself: she can repeat by heart almost everything she has ever read, particularly Pope's Homer from end to end; has studied Euclid by herself; and, in short, is a woman of very extraordinary abilities. On conversing with her I find her fully equal to the character given of her. She is very much flattered that I send for her, and that she sees a poet who has "put out a book," as she says. She is, among other things, a great florist—and is rather past the meridian of once celebrated beauty.

I walk in *Esther's* garden with Miss Lindsay, and after some little chit-chat of the tender kind, I presented her with a proof print of my Nob, which she accepted with something more tender than gratitude. She told me many little stories which Miss —— had retailed concerning her and me, with prolonging pleasure—God bless her! Was waited on by the magistrates, and presented with the freedom of the burgh.

Took farewell of Jedburgh, with some melancholy, disagreeable sensations.—Jed, pure be thy crystal streams, and hallowed thy sylvan banks! Sweet Isabella Lindsay, may peace dwell in thy bosom, uninterrupted except by the tumultuous throbbings of rapturous love! That love-kindling eye must beam on another, not on me; that graceful form must bless another's arms, not mine!

Kelso.—Dine with the farmers' club—all gentlemen, talking of high matters—each of them keeps a hunter from thirty to fifty pounds' value, and attends the fox-huntings in the country. Go out with Mr Ker, one of the club, and a friend of Mr Ainslie's, to lie—Mr Ker a most gentlemanly, clever, handsome fellow, a widower with some fine children—his manner astonishingly like my dear old friend Robert Muir, in Kilmarnock—everything in Mr Ker's most elegant—he offers to accompany me in my English tour. Dine with Sir Alexander Don—a pretty clever fellow, but far from being a match for his divine lady. A very wet day. . . . Sleep at Stodrig again; and set out for Melrose—visit Dryburgh, a fine old ruined abbey—still bad weather—cross Leader, and come up Tweed to Melrose—dine there, and visit that far-famed glorious ruin—come to Selkirk, up Ettrick; the whole

country hereabout, both on Tweed and Ettrick, remarkably stony.

Monday.—Come to Inverleithing, a famous shaw, and in the vicinity of the palace of Traquair, where having dined, and drank some Galloway whey, I here remain till to-morrow. Saw Elibanks and Elibraes, on the other side of the Tweed.

Tuesday.—Drank tea yesternight at Pirn, with Mr Horsburgh. Breakfasted to-day with Mr Ballantyne of Hollowlee. Proposal for a four-horse team, to consist of Mr Scott of Wauchope, Fittieland; Logan of Logan, Fittiefurr; Ballantine of Hollowlee, Forewynd; Horsburgh of Horsburgh. Dine at a country inn, kept by a miller, in Earlston, the birthplace and residence of the celebrated Thomas à Rhymer—saw the ruins of his castle—come to Berrywell.

Wednesday.—Dine at Dunse with the farmers' club-company—impossible to do them justice. Rev. Mr Smith a famous punster, and Mr Meikle a celebrated mechanic, and inventor of the threshing-mills.

Thursday.—Breakfast at Berrywell, and walk into Dunse to see a famous knife made by a cutler there, and to be presented to an Italian prince. A pleasant ride with my friend Mr Robert Ainslie and his sister to Mr Thomson's, a man who has newly commenced farmer, and has married a Miss Patty Grieve, formerly a flame of Mr Robert Ainslie's. Company—Miss Jacky Grieve, an amiable sister of Mrs Thomson's, and Mr Hood, an honest, worthy, facetious farmer in the neighbourhood.

Friday.—Ride to Berwick—an idle town, rudely picturesque. Meet Lord Errol in walking round the walls—his lordship's flattering notice of me. Dine with Mr Clunzie, merchant—nothing particular in company or conversation. Come up a bold shore, and over a wild country, to Eyemouth—sup and sleep at Mr Grieve's.

Saturday.—Spend the day at Mr Grieve's—made a royal arch mason of St Abb's Lodge. Mr William Grieve, the oldest brother, a joyous, warm-hearted clever, jolly fellow—takes a hearty glass, and sings a good song. Mr Robert, his brother, and partner in trade, a good fellow, but says little. Take a sail after dinner. Fishing of all kinds pays tithes at Eyemouth.

Sunday.—A Mr Robinson, brewer at Ednam, sets out with us to Dunbar. The Miss Grieves very good girls—my bardship's heart got a brush from Miss Betsey.

Mr William Grieve's attachment to the family-circle so fond, that when he is out, which by the by is often the case, he cannot go to bed till he see if all his sisters are sleeping well——Pass the famous Abbey of Coldingham, and Pease-bridge. Call at Mr Sheriff's, where Mr A. and I dine. Mr S. talkative and conceited. I talk of love to Nancy the whole evening, while her brother escorts home some companions like himself. Sir James Hall of Dunglass, having heard of my being in the neighbourhood, comes to Mr Sheriff's to breakfast—takes me to see his fine scenery on the stream of Dunglass—Dunglass the most romantic, sweet place I ever saw—Sir James and his lady a pleasant happy couple. He points out a walk for which he has an uncommon respect, as it was made by an aunt of his, to whom he owes much.

Miss —— will accompany me to Dunbar, by way of making a parade of me as a sweetheart of hers, among her relations. She mounts an old cart-horse, as huge and as lean as a house; a rusty old side-saddle, without girth or stirrup, but fastened on with an old pillion-girth; herself as fine as hands could make her, in cream-coloured riding clothes, hat and feather, etc. I, ashamed of my situation, ride like the devil, and almost shake her to pieces on old Jolly—get rid of her by refusing to call at her uncle's with her.

Passed through the most glorious corn-country I ever saw, till I reach Dunbar, a neat little town.—Dine with Provost Fall, an eminent merchant and most respectable character, but undescribable, as he exhibits no marked traits. Mrs Fall a genius in painting; fully more clever in

the fine arts and sciences than my friend Lady Wauchope, without her consummate assurance of her own abilities.—Call with Mr Robinson (who, by the by, I find to be a worthy, much-respected man, very modest; warm, social heart, which with less good sense than his would be perhaps, with the children of prim precision and pride, rather inimical to that respect which is man's due from man)—with him I call on Miss Clark, a maiden, in the Scotch phrase, "guid enough, but no brent new:" a clever woman, with tolerable pretensions to remark and wit; while time had blown the blushing bud of bashful modesty into the flower of easy confidence. She wanted to see what sort of *raree show* an author was, and to let him know, that though Dunbar was but a little town, yet it was not destitute of people of parts.

Breakfast next morning at Skateraw, at Mr Lee's, a farmer of great note. Mr Lee an excellent, hospitable social fellow, rather oldish; warm-hearted and chatty—a most judicious, sensible farmer. Mr Lee detains me till next morning. Company at dinner—my Rev. acquaintance Dr Bowmaker, a reverend, rattling old fellow; two sea-lieutenants; a cousin of the landlord's, a fellow whose looks are of that kind which deceived me in a gentleman at Kelso, and has often deceived me—a goodly handsome figure and face, which incline one to give them credit for parts which they have not; Mr Clarke, a much cleverer fellow, but whose looks, a little cloudy, and his appearance, rather ungainly, with an every-day observer may prejudice the opinion against him; Dr Brown, a medical young gentleman from Dunbar, a fellow whose face and manners are open and engaging. Leave Skateraw for Dunse next day, along with Collector ——, a lad of slender abilities and bashfully diffident to an extreme.

Found Miss Ainslie, the amiable, the sensible, the good-humoured, the sweet Miss Ainslie, all alone at Berrywell. Heavenly powers, who know the weakness of human hearts, support mine! What happiness must I see only to remind me that I cannot enjoy it!

Lammermuir hills, from East Lothian to Dunse, very wild. Dine with the farmers' club at Kelso. Sir John Hume and Mr Lumsden there, but nothing worth

remembrance when the following circumstance is considered—I walk into Dunse before dinner, and out to Berrywell in the evening with Miss Ainslie—how well-bred, how frank, how good she is! Charming Rachael! may thy bosom never be wrung by the evils of this life of sorrows, or by the villany of this world's sons!

Thursday.—Mr Ker and I set out to dine at Mr Hood's on our way to England.

I am taken extremely ill, with strong feverish symptoms, and take a servant of Mr Hood's to watch me all night—embittering remorse scares my fancy at the gloomy forebodings of death. I am determined to live for the future in such a manner as not to be scared at the approach of death: I am sure I could meet him with indifference, but for "the something beyond the grave." Mr Hood agrees to accompany us to England if we will wait till Sunday.

Friday.—I go with Mr Hood to see a roup of an unfortunate farmer's stock—rigid economy and decent industry, do you preserve me from being the principal *dramatis persona* in such a scene of horror!

Meet my good old friend Mr Ainslie, who calls on Mr Hood in the evening to take farewell of my bardship. This day I feel myself warm with sentiments of gratitude to the Great Preserver of men, who has kindly restored me to health and strength once more.

A pleasant walk with my young friend Douglas Ainslie, a sweet, modest, clever young fellow.

Sunday, 27th May.—Cross Tweed, and traverse the moors through a wild country till I reach Alnwick—Alnwick Castle a seat of the Duke of Northumberland, furnished in a most princely manner.—A Mr Wilkin, agent of his Grace's, shows us the house and policies—Mr Wilkin a discreet, sensible, ingenious man.

Monday.—Come, still through by-ways, to Warkworth, where we dine. Hermitage and old castle. Warkworth situated very picturesque, with Coquet Island, a small rocky spot, the seat of an old monastery, facing it a little

in the sea; and the small but romantic river Coquet running through it. Sleep at Morpeth, a pleasant enough little town, and on next day to Newcastle. Meet with a very agreeable, sensible fellow, a Mr Chattox, who shows us a great many civilities, and who dines and sups with us.

Wednesday.—Left Newcastle early in the morning, and rode over a fine country to Hexham to breakfast—from Hexham to Wardrue, the celebrated Spa, where we slept.

Thursday.—Reach Longtown to dine, and part there with my good friends Messrs Hood and Ker—a hiring day in Longtown—I am uncommonly happy to see so many young folks enjoying life. I come to Carlisle. (Meet a strange enough romantic adventure by the way, in falling in with a girl and her married sister: the girl, after some overtures of gallantry on my side, sees me a little cut with the bottle, and offers to take me in for a Gretna-green affair. I not being such a gull as she imagines, make an appointment with her, by way of *vive la bagatelle*, to hold a conference on it when we reach town. I meet her in town and give her a brush of caressing and a bottle of cyder; but finding herself *un peu trompé* in her man she sheers off.) Next day I meet my good friend Mr Mitchell, and walk with him round the town and its environs, and through his printing-works, etc.,—four or five hundred people employed, many of them women and children. Dine with Mr Mitchell, and leave Carlisle. Come by the coast to Annan. Overtaken on the way by a curious old fish of a shoemaker, and miner from Cumberland mines.

[*Here the Manuscript abruptly terminates.*]

BURNS'S HIGHLAND TOUR

25th August 1787.—I leave Edinburgh for a northern tour, in company with my good friend Mr Nicol, whose originality of humour promises me much entertainment. Linlithgow—a fertile improved country—West Lothian. The more elegance and luxury among the farmers, I always observe, in equal proportion the rudeness and stupidity of the peasantry. This remark I have made all over the Lothians, Merse, Roxburgh, etc. For this, among other reasons, I think that a man of romantic taste, a "man of feeling," will be better pleased with the poverty, but intelligent minds, of the peasantry in Ayrshire (peasantry they are all below the justice of peace) than the opulence of a club of Merse farmers, when at the same time he considers the vandalism of their plough-folks, etc. I carry this idea so far, that an uninclosed, half-improven country is to me actually more agreeable, and gives me more pleasure as a prospect, than a country cultivated like a garden.—Soil about Linlithgow light and thin. The town carries the appearance of rude, decayed grandeur—charmingly rural, retired situation. The old royal palace a tolerably fine, but melancholy, ruin—sweetly situated on a small elevation, by the brink of a loch. Shown the room where the beautiful, injured Mary Queen of Scots was born—a pretty good old Gothic church. The infamous stool of repentance standing, in the old Romish way, on a lofty situation.

What a poor, pimping business is a Presbyterian place of worship; dirty, narrow, and squalid; stuck in a corner of old popish grandeur such as Linlithgow, and much more, Melrose! Ceremony and show, if judiciously thrown in, absolutely necessary for the bulk of mankind, both in religious and civil matters.—Dine—go to my friend Smith's, at Avon, printfield—find nobody but Mrs Miller, an agreeable, sensible, modest, good body; as useful but

not so ornamental as Fielding's Miss Western—not rigidly polite *à la Francais*, but easy, hospitable, and housewifely.

An old lady from Paisley, a Mrs Lawson, whom I promise to call for in Paisley: like old Lady W——, and still more like Mrs C——, her conversation is pregnant with strong sense and just remark, but, like them, a certain air of self-importance and a *duresse* in the eye seem to indicate, as the Ayrshire wife observed of her cow, that "she had a mind o' her ain."

Pleasant view of Dumfermline and the rest of the fertile coast of Fife, as we go down to that dirty, ugly place, Burrowstones—see a horse-race and call on a friend of Mr Nicol's, a Bailie Cowan, of whom I know too little to attempt his portrait—come through the rich carse of Falkirk to pass the night. Falkirk nothing remarkable except the tomb of Sir John the Graham, over which, in the succession of time, four stones have been placed. Camelon, the ancient metropolis of the Picts, now a small village in the neighbourhood of Falkirk. Cross the grand canal to Carron—come past Larbert, and admire a fine monument of cast-iron erected by Mr Bruce, the African traveller, to his wife.

Pass Dunipace, a place laid out with fine taste—a charming amphitheatre, bounded by Denny village, and pleasant seats down the way to Dunipace.—The Carron running down the bosom of the whole makes it one of the most charming little prospects I have seen.

Dine at Auchinbowie—Mr Monro an excellent, worthy old man—Miss Monro an amiable, sensible, sweet young woman, much resembling Mrs Grierson. Come to Bannockburn—shown the old house where James III. finished so tragically his unfortunate life. The field of Bannockburn—the hole where glorious Bruce set his standard. Here no Scot can pass uninterested. I fancy to myself that I see my gallant, heroic countrymen coming o'er the hill and down upon the plunderers of their country, the murderers of their fathers, noble revenge and just hate glowing in every vein, striding more and more eagerly as they approach the oppressive, insulting, bloodthirsty foe! I see them meet in gloriously-triumphant congratulation

on the victorious field, exulting in their heroic royal leader and rescued liberty and independence!—Come to Stirling.

Monday.—Go to Harvieston. Go to see Caudron linn, and Rumbling brig, and Diel's mill. Return in the evening. Supper—Messrs Doig, the schoolmaster; Bell; and Captain Forrester of the castle. Doig a queerish figure, and something of a pedant—Bell a joyous fellow, who sings a good song—Forrester a merry, swearing kind of man, with a dash of the sodger.

Tuesday Morning.—Breakfast with Captain Forrester—Ochel hills—Devon river—Forth and Tieth—Allan river—Strathallan, a fine country, but little improved—cross Earn to Crieff—dine, and go to Arbruchil—cold reception at Arbruchil—a most romantically pleasant ride up Earn, by Auchtertyre and Comrie, to Arbruchil—sup at Crieff.

Wednesday Morning.—Leave Crieff—Glen Amond—Amond river—Ossian's grave—Loch Fruoch—Glenquaich—landlord and landlady remarkable characters—Taymouth described in rhyme—meet the Hon. Charles Townshend.

Thursday.—Come down Tay to Dunkeld—Glenlyon House—Lyon river—Druids' temple—three circles of stones, the outermost sunk; the second has thirteen stones remaining, the innermost has eight; two large detached ones, like a gate, to the south-east—say prayers in it—pass Taybridge—Aberfeldy—described in rhyme—Castle Menzies—Inver—Dr Stewart—sup.

Friday.—Walk with Mrs Stewart and Beard to Birnam top—fine prospect down Tay—Craigieburn hills—hermitage on the Branwater, with a picture of Ossian—breakfast with Dr Stewart—Neil Gow plays—a short, stout-built, honest Highland figure, with his grayish hair shed on his honest social brow; an interesting face, marking strong sense, kind openheartedness, mixed with unmistrusting simplicity—visit his house—Marget Gow.

Ride up Tummel river to Blair—Fascally a beautiful

romantic nest—wild grandeur of the pass of Gilliecrankie —visit the gallant Lord Dundee's stone.

Blair—sup with the Duchess—easy and happy from the manners of the family—confirmed in my good opinion of my friend Walker.

Saturday.—Visit the scenes round Blair—fine, but spoiled with bad taste—Tilt and Gairie rivers—Falls on the Tilt—heather seat—ride in company with Sir William Murray and Mr Walker, to Loch Tummel—meanderings of the Rannach, which runs through quondam Struan Robertson's estate, from Loch Rannach to Loch Tummel. Dine at Blair: company — General Murray; Captain Murray, an honest tar; Sir William Murray, an honest, worthy man, but tormented with the hypochondria; Mrs Graham, *belle et aimable;* Miss Catchcart; Mrs Murray, a painter; Mrs King; Duchess and fine family, the Marquis, Lords James, Edward, and Robert. Ladies Charlotte, Emilia, and children dance. Sup—Mr Graham of Fintry.

Come up the Garrie—Falls of Bruar—Daldecairoch—Dalwhinnie—dine—snow on the hills seventeen feet deep —no corn from Loch Gairie to Dalwhinnie—cross the Spey, and come down the stream to Pitnin—Straths rich—*les environs* picturesque—Craigow hill—Ruthven of Badenoch—barracks—wild and magnificent—Rothemurche on the other side, and Glenmore—Grant of Rothemurche's poetry, told me by the Duke of Gordon—Strathspey, rich and romantic. Breakfast at Aviemore, a wild spot—dine at Sir James Grant's—Lady Grant a sweet, pleasant body —come through mist and darkness to Dulsie to lie.

Tuesday.—Findhorn river—rocky banks—come on to Castle Cawdor, where Macbeth murdered King Duncan—saw the bed in which King Duncan was stabbed—dine at Kilravock—Mrs Rose, sen., a true chieftain's wife—Fort George—Inverness.

Wednesday.—Loch Ness—Braes of Ness—General's hut —Falls of Fyers—Urquhart Castle and Strath.

Thursday.—Come over Culloden Muir—reflections on

the field of battle—breakfast at Kilravock—old Mrs Rose, sterling sense, warm heart, strong passions, and honest pride, all in an uncommon degree—Mrs Rose, jun., a little milder than the mother; this perhaps owing to her being younger—Mr Grant, minister at Calder, resembles Mr Scott at Inverleithing—Mrs Rose and Mrs Grant accompany us to Kildrummie—two young ladies: Miss Rose, who sung two Gaelic songs, beautiful and lovely; Miss Sophia Brodie, most agreeable and amiable; both of them gentle, mild, the sweetest creatures on earth, and happiness be with them!—Dine at Nairn—fall in with a pleasant enough gentleman, Dr Stewart, who had been long abroad with his father in the Forty-five; and Mr Falconer, a spare, irascible, warm-hearted Norland, and a Nonjuror—Brodie-house to lie.

Friday.—Forres—famous stone at Forres—Mr Brodie tells me that the muir where Shakspeare lays Macbeth's witch-meeting is still haunted—that the country folks won't pass it by night. . . .

Venerable ruins of Elgin Abbey—a grander effect at first glance than Melrose, but not near so beautiful—cross Spey to Fochabers—fine palace, worthy of the generous proprietor. Dine—company, Duke and Duchess, Ladies Charlotte and Magdeline, Col. Abercrombie and lady, Mr Gordon and Mr ——, a clergyman, a venerable, aged figure: the Duke makes me happier than ever great man did—noble, princely, yet mild, condescending, and affable, gay and kind—the Duchess witty and sensible—God bless them!

Come to Cullen to lie—hitherto the country is sadly poor and unimproven.

Come to Aberdeen—meet with Mr Chalmers, printer, a facetious fellow—Mr Ross, a fine fellow, like Professor Tytler—Mr Marshal, one of the *poetæ minores*—Mr Sheriffs, author of *Jamie and Bess*, a little decrepid body with some abilities—Bishop Skinner, a Nonjuror, son of the author of *Tullochgorum*, a man whose mild venerable manner is the most marked of any in so young a man—Professor Gordon, a good-natured, jolly-looking professor—Aberdeen, a lazy town—near Stonhive, the coast a good

deal romantic—meet my relations—Robert Burns, writer, in Stonhive, one of those who love fun, a gill, and a punning joke, and have not a bad heart—his wife a sweet hospitable body, without any affectation of what is called town-breeding.

Tuesday.—Breakfast with Mr Burns—lie at Lawrence Kirk—album library—Mrs —— a jolly, frank, sensible, love-inspiring widow—Howe of the Mearns, a rich, cultivated, but still uninclosed country.

Wednesday.—Cross North Esk river, and a rich country to Craigow.

. . . . . .

Go to Montrose, that finely-situated, handsome town—breakfast at Muthie, and sail along that wild rocky coast, and see the famous cavern particularly the Gairiepot—land and dine at Arbroath—stately ruins—Arbroath Abbey—come to Dundee, through a fertile country—Dundee low-lying but pleasant town — old steeple—Tayfrith—Broughty Castle, a finely situated ruin, jutting into the Tay.

Friday.—Breakfast with the Miss Scotts—Miss Bess Scott like Mrs Greenfield; my bardship almost in love with her—come through the rich harvests and fine hedge-rows of the carse of Gowrie, along the romantic margin of the Grampian hills, to Perth—fine, fruitful, hilly, woody country round Perth.

Saturday Morning.—Leave Perth—come up Strathearn to Endermay—fine, fruitful, cultivated strath—the scene of *Bessie Bell and Mary Gray*, near Perth—fine scenery on the banks of the May—Mrs Belcher, gawcie, frank, affable, fond of rural sports, hunting, etc.—lie at Kinross—reflections in a fit of the colic.

Sunday.—Pass through a cold, barren country to Queensferry—dine—cross the ferry, and on to Edinburgh.

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